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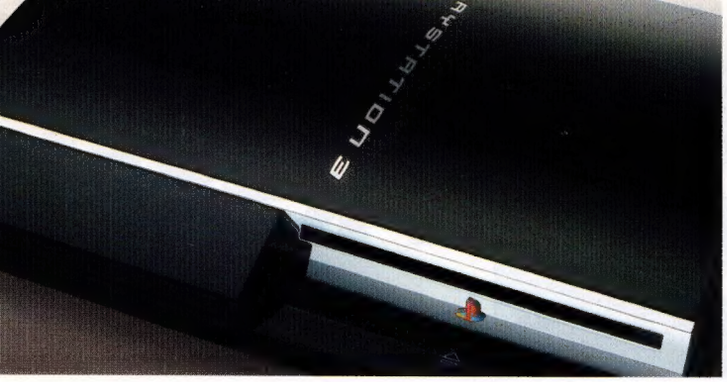

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Editor's Letter

There can be no doubt that the Playstation 3's launch has been a resounding commercial success. Regardless of the disputed number of consoles that actually made it to stores for both the Japanese and US launch days, the PS3 has sold out and continued to sell out on each of its subsequent re-stocks. Essentially, as fast as Sony makes the PS3, it sells.

Total number of sold (at the time of writing) is somewhere in the region of a million, which compares favourably to anything that either Nintendo or Microsoft can claim for their respective consoles but, of course, the real story won't be known until all the early adopters have their consoles and supply becomes a regular flow.

A commercial success, yes, but has it been a critical success? Well, on the whole, the launch games have been good; however, they were PS2 good, not PS3 good. Only *Resistance* really offers something different, but then only in a big version of a PS2 FPS kind of way; the launch has a really familiar feel to it.

It was to be expected: a few new IPs from Sony and some tried and trusted titles from its third parties; a console's launch is hardly the time to try and release the new *GTA*.

The good thing about the PS3's delay in Europe, however, is that those games who will follow the console's launch in the US and Japan will be there for us to play right from the off and it will feel like a genuine jump to the next generation.

Just be patient – there's just a couple of months left to wait now...

Your team on next3

Bringing you the best advice from the experts

Keith Hennessey

Keith spent some quality time in NYC this month. He took his lady (or she took him, we're not sure) to the Big Apple for a spot of R&R. He did all the touristy things: Empire State Building, Cenral Park, proposed the girlfriend... Yes, sorry ladies, but the Hendessesy is now off the market. Official. You can still send in your knickers to the usual address, just don't tell the missus. Cheers.

Thomas Leclerc

Tompey spent a week holidaying in Germany this month. At an Eighties-themed hotel. The only problem was that the bar staff forced him to drink only the local tipple – an ale with the potency of Tennant's Extra. It was pretty harsh on the boy as he only ever drinks Campari and soda with a twist of lemon. God, Tompey is so macho.

Craig Gilmore

Craig, on the other hand, visited our magnificent capital city *for the first time in his life* (that's London, by the way, pub quiz fans). Not only that, but he rode on the Underground for the first time too and it was on the Northern Line – ironic as Craig hails from Lancaster, birthplace of the famous Lancaster bomber. Which isn't ironic, it's just a fact. Ho-hum.

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Pictures
Cover image: Resistance: Fall of Man™ ©2006 Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. Published by Sony Computer Entertainment Europe. Developed by Insomniac Games, Inc. Resistance: Fall of Man is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment Europe. All rights reserved.

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Subscriptions
☎ 0870 787 9817
Email: next3@servicehelpline.co.uk
13 issue subscription (UK) – £41.60

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Printed by
Wyndeham Heron, The Bentall complex, Colchester Road, Heybridge, Maldon, Essex CM9 4NW
Distributed by Seymour Distribution, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London, EC1A 9PT
☎ 0207 429 4000

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ISSN 1751-455X

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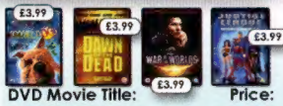

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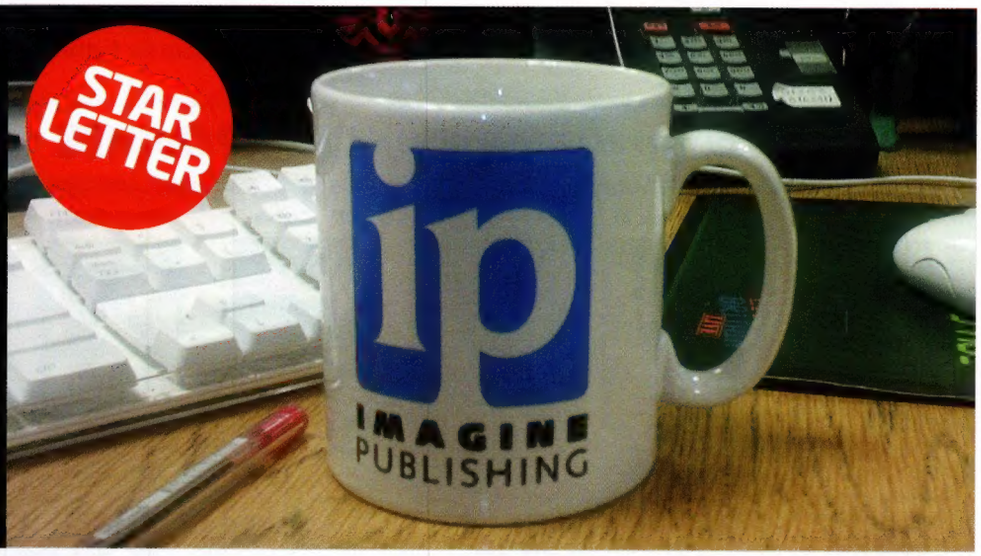
Fighting the good fight

Aren't you bored? I imagine the life of a games journalist isn't that chocolate covered, what with you having to review even the worst games sometimes – and lots of them at that. But given the current nature of the games industry, with more and more mediocre junk hitting the shelves, surely it's taking its toll? Just how do you guys survive when even the biggest games feel old?

Sean Morgan, Manchester

■ **What keeps us going is the notion that for all the bad or middle-of-the-road games that exist, there's *MGS4*, *The Darkness*, *Assassin's Creed*, *Devil May Cry 4*, *Half Life 2*, *Resident Evil 5* and more on the horizon, and the promise of a next-gen experience that comes with them. At the very least we know these games will be great... and that's enough for us.**



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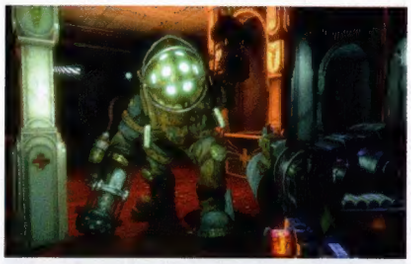

Bioshaft?

Got a release date for *Bioshock* on Playstation 3? It looks like a fantastic survival horror game. Thanks for the mag!

Connor Jackson, Ireland

■ We are big Irrational Games fans and believe that *Bioshock* will be huge next year, but there is currently no confirmation of a release date for the PS3 version. However, given Peter Moore's words at the Tokyo Game Show ("Exclusive to PC and Xbox 360 this Summer") we wouldn't rule its Playstation 3 release out just yet.

Psychostation

I need help. I'm so obsessed with the Playstation 3 that every time I open my mouth, my parents ask me if it's about the console. If it is they just blank me. I saw your mag and wanted to cut out a picture of the PS3 and thought I'd found a cure – but I didn't want to ruin your cool magazine. Any solutions?

Gary Henry, Southampton

■ Er... photocopy it instead?

Delay days

Thanks for giving us PS3-hungry public such a great magazine. It's wonderful to see one that isn't afraid to say what's really happening without buttering up Sony. I'm waiting with baited breath for the Playstation 3 and feel the new March release date will only mean better launch games and the ironing out of bugs. Keep up the great work.

Nathan Cheng, South Wales

■ Thanks for the kind words, Nathan. We make the magazine for people such as yourself. We also agree completely; while the delay news was disappointing to say the least, the opportunity for more launch games with new features and less bugs means that Europe could genuinely come out on top.

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IT'S A SHOE-IN

Nike produces limited-edition PS3 trainers

Those who had trouble finding a PS3 will have an even harder time seeking out a pair of these super-limited-edition trainers from Nike, produced to commemorate the launch of the PS3. Only 24 pairs of these Air Max trainers were made that come sporting the US launch date on the tongue and heel. If you're brave enough to peer inside after a sweaty training session, you'll see a partial picture of the Sixaxis printed inside and the words 'Play Beyond' scrawled along the bottom. If it's all the same to Nike, we'll be sticking with our comfy grandad slip-ons for now.

PS3 VERSUS WII

How the two staked-up on launch day USA

UNITS SOLD

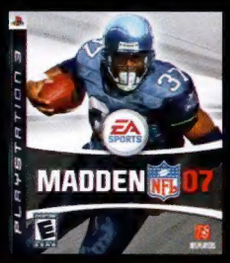
PS3: 400,000 units

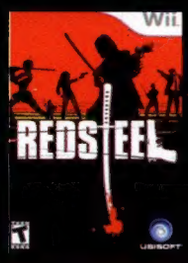
Wii: 600,000 units

ATTACH RATE

PS3: 1.5 games bought per system

Wii: 3.0 games bought per system





BEST-SELLING GAME

PS3: Resistance: Fall Of Man

Wii: Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess

Playstation 3 launches in North America

PLAYSTATIO

AFTER what many considered a very muted Japanese debut, it was a different scenario on 17 November when Sony introduced a games-mad American public to the Playstation 3. Holding midnight-launch extravaganzas in New York and San Francisco, Sony went all out to let the Western world know that a star had been born and the dawn of the new generation had broken. All the staples of a good launch were evident; queues snaking around city blocks, umpteen news stations doing human interest stories, and the customary shortage of systems. While ostensibly this console launch seemed no different from any other, there was a darker side to proceedings that saw tempers flair, fights break out and even shootings in the name of PS3.

Both positive and negative sides to the launch could be witnessed at the event at the Sony Style store in Manhattan, New York. Budget guest stars Ludacris and Karime Adibebe (the Lara Croft model) were joined by Sony's CEO Howard Stringer and president Kaz Hirai to hand out consoles.

The first three customers in line had their devotion rewarded by being given their PS3 and a selection of games for free. Another unit was presented to the person lucky enough to find a 'golden ticket' in their gift bag – reports the winner answered to the name 'Bucket' are still unconfirmed. But proceedings soon turned sour with constant queue jumping and unpoliced lines, leading the feisty New York natives to push, fight and even shoot each other. Though there were no casualties, this wasn't an isolated incident – in Lexington, Kentucky people queueing for a PS3 were sprayed with shots from a BB gun, with four people being hit. Other unsavoury stories included a report by *The Sacramento Bee* of systems being stolen at gunpoint in California and people being mugged while waiting in line.

Despite numerous misdemeanours, it wasn't representative of the US launch as a whole. Over in San Francisco things went rather more smoothly, with Sony staging an extravagant delivery of the first batch of consoles; SCEA vice president Jack Tretton arrived in a huge truck accompanied by

San Francisco saw empty boxes delivered - the real PS3s already in the shop, the boxes were empty in case the crowds robbed them.

N'S FREE

armed guards. At the door of Sony's flagship Playstation store, Tretton unboxed one of the PS3s and held it aloft evoking a triumphant cheer from the crowd. Little did the people there know that the other boxes were empty (a precaution in case the crowd turned nasty) and that the real PS3s were already bagged up inside the shop waiting to be collected by the lucky people sporting wristbands guaranteeing them a console.

Indeed, you had to be very fortunate to pick up a PS3 on launch day in the States, because just like the launch in Japan, units were in very short supply. In the days leading up to launch, rumours of slashes to shipment figures began to emerge and news service Bloomberg suggested that the actual figure shipped was much less than expected. Sony's target figure of 400,000 PS3s was disappointingly low to begin with, but several industry insiders have confessed to Bloomberg that the final figure might have actually been as few as half that. When quizzed about this, Sony said, "We shipped as many Playstation 3 units into the North American market as possible and continue our efforts in supplying systems to retailers nationwide through the holidays." As a follow-up, Sony confirmed its plans to have shipped a million PS3s into the US by the end of 2006.

This positive outlook is shared by Sony's director of corporate communications, Dave Karraker who claims "SCEA couldn't be more pleased with the response we have seen from consumers since the launch of PS3." He continued. "This truly demonstrates the power of the PlayStation brand and further validates our belief that consumers see real value in an entertainment system that will define the next decade of digital entertainment." In regards to supplies, Karraker states that manufacturing is now running smoothly and new shipments are arriving on a weekly basis. On the whole, Sony does have plenty to smile about; all of the PS3s that were shipped sold out in a matter of hours, and spurred on by demand for the PS3 it saw sales of both the PSP and the PS2 increase. For the stat fans out there, some other figures you might like to ogle include game attach rate that came in at 1.5 games per console (an increase on the 0.98 rate in Japan) with *Resistance* and *Madden* notching up the most sales.

Shooting, muggings and shortages aside, there were a lot of positives to be taken from the PS3's biggest launch so far. All the mud that's been slung at the Playstation 3 over the past few months clearly hasn't killed people's enthusiasm for the console. Now with new shipments arriving, accompanied by more and more exciting games (not to mention a highly anticipated European launch on the cards), it seems all the pieces are falling into place for not only the rapid adoption of the PS3, but also for Sony to reclaim its place as king of the console castle.

"Constant queue-jumping led New Yorkers to push, fight, and even shoot each other"

EBAY PAY DAY

PS3 owners cash in

Though we were impressed by the size of the PS3 queues, what did prove disappointing was the amount of people who were there solely to get a machine and sell it straight away for a profit. Rather than being excited about the prospect of owning a new Playstation, a large majority of people were more excited about the amount of money they would make by putting it up for sale on internet auction sites like eBay. But with a new PS3 fetching anything between $2000 and $15000 on launch day, can we really blame them?

14,675 PS3s were sold on eBay in the first week of launch, with an average price of $1,186.

newsflashes

CALL OF CONTEMPORARY

A few months ago rumours surfaced that Activision was developing a modern-day version of its awesome war franchise *Call Of Duty*, but without confirmation from the publisher the trail has gone rather cold of late. Well, prepare to get at least luke warm again as website Amped IGO has posted an article containing some titbits about the game. Apparently the enemies in the game will have 15 critical points of impact on their heads, allowing players to shoot off ears or even helmets - sounds painful. The game is also said to be beefing up the multiplayer element with 54-player battles.

FACEPLATE OR DEFACED?

As the Xbox 360 boasts a range of (pretty lame) faceplates we wondered if Sony would follow suit and make elements of the PS3 unit customisable. It seems that other inquisitive gamers out there shared our quandaries and started to investigate by giving the PS3 an old fashioned touching up. After much intimate exploration, it was found that the semi-transparent black faceplate on top of the machine is removable, which seems to suggest there could be a market for themed PS3 lids... we've already bagsied a Girls Aloud one.

KILLING DAY KILLED

After an impressive showing at E3 Ubisoft's FPS, *Killing Day* caused quite a stir, but the buzz has been shot dead with news that the game has been cancelled. When we made enquires a representative from Ubisoft confirmed that "*Killing Day* is no longer part of Ubisoft's portfolio", which suggests the rights to the game may have shifted to another publisher. Already working on an extensive PS3 catalogue that includes *Assassin's Creed*, *Haze* and *Brothers In Arms*, Ubisoft still has plenty to keep it occupied over the coming months.

THE LOST PROFITS

Sony losing hundreds on every PS3 sold

THE price of the Playstation 3 has earned Sony more than its fair share of criticism over the past year, but if you think the cost is high for the consumer then perhaps you should spare a thought for Sony who is reportedly losing as much as £240 on every 20Gb PS3 sold. According to a research report by electronic specialist iSuppli, the manufacturing cost of the 20GB PS3 is $805.85 (£630), which is $300 more than its retail price. These figures are yet to be confirmed by Sony, but the price is an estimate based on the console's component parts and doesn't even include the cost of the controllers, cables or swanky packaging. The main money drains are the RSX graphics chip ($129) and the Blu-ray optical drive ($125).

The recent addition of HDMI to the 20GB version could be seen as a contributing factor in the high cost of production, but unfortunately the beefier 60Gb doesn't fare too well with Sony losing an estimated £190 at retail. To put the situation into perspective, the Xbox 360 only costs £170 to manufacture and sells at £280 – so Microsoft makes a tidy profit on each and every single console sold.

It seems retailers are also getting a raw deal as, like Sony, it only makes money on software and peripherals. Of course, over time the cost of producing PS3s will fall as components get cheaper and manufacturing methods are refined. However, Sony won't be seeing a return on its new super computer any time soon and will have to rely on the sales of games and downloads from its new online network to balance the books. While these figures might make alarming reading for Sony accountants they do serve as a good example of what an absolute bargain gamers are getting when picking up a PS3. Even the number crunching speckies at iSuppli are impressed by what is housed inside the shiny black box. When talking about the PS3's capabilities Andrew Rassweiler, iSuppli's services manager and senior analyst, said "You are getting the performance of a super computer at the price of an entry level PC... While many fret over the cost of the Playstation 3 compared to the competition, it does provide more processing power and capability than any other consumer electronics device in history."

It's gushing sound bites like these that will help Sony in its fight to gain next-gen supremacy, but with the company haemorrhaging money on hardware let's hope it can afford to keep up the fight.

CONSOLE	PLAYSTATION3 20GB	PLAYSTATION3 60GB	XBOX 360
MOTHERBOARD	$500.00	$500.00	$204.00
WIRELESS BOARD	$6.60	$22.10	$4.75
MEMORY CARD BOARD	N/A	$5.00	N/A
OPTICAL DRIVE	$125.00	$125.00	$19.45
HARD DRIVE DISK	$43.00	$54.00	$43.00
POWER SUPPLY	$37.50	$37.50	$25.50
COOLING/MOUNTING CAGE FOR MOTHERBOARD	$22.00	$22.00	N/A
ENCLOSURE/HARDWARE	$31.00	$33.00	$20.50
MISCELLANEOUS OTHER ASSEMBLIES	$1.75	$1.75	N/A
MANUFACTURING COSTS	$39.00	$40.00	$6.10
TOTAL CONSOLE COST ESTIMATE	$805.85	$840.35	$323.30
SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICING (US)	$499.00	$599.00	$399.00
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COST AND RETAIL PRICE	$306.85	$241.35	+ $75.70

Source: ISuppli Corporation 2006

Homebrew on the Playstation 3?

ANYONE FOR A BREW?

WHEN we look at the PS3 release list spread out before us, we get so excited we have to fight to stop a little bit of wee from coming out. We can't wait to get Sony's newborn back to ours, fire it up and jump into some 40-player multiplayer action on the likes of *Resistance*. However, while most of us are looking forward to the dawn of the next-generation, some strange individuals are still rooted in the past. Proof of this was exposed this month when several US gamers tried to use Linux to run *Super Mario Bros* – we despair, we really do. It wasn't even in high-def or anything...

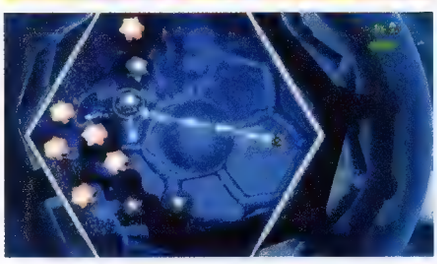
A video of the heinous offence was posted on the internet and showed only a quick flash of everyone's favourite plumber and a few lines of (probably faked) Linux command lines. Whether this homebrewing is genuine or not it highlights an important issue with the PS3 and its smaller sibling the PSP – if the PS3 follows the same path as the PlayStation Portable, Sony is going to have a hard time making its download service a success. After all, it won't be making a penny on downloads if some clever beard stroker works out how to play umpteenth pirated retro games for nothing. By offering such an open system with the choice of several different operating systems Sony might not be unable to control the content coming onto the machine. As with the PSP it can release firmware updates, but as the shrewd brewers have proved time and time again there's often ways around it.

Unlike other systems, such as the original Xbox that required modification by chips and bigger hard drives to emulate games; Sony has (commendably) made the PS3 so open and accessible that it believed no modification would be necessary. Not that we're endorsing such behaviour, but why would people pay to download games if there were a way to play them for free? However, Sony is certain to have measures in place to cause the onset of (home) brewers droop.

HISTORY OF HOMEBREW

The old and the brew

When the PSP was still in short trousers it was discovered that it could be used to run user-made content and emulation software. By downloading new applications and ROMs you can turn your pocket pal into a miniature Mega Drive or NES. Quickly identifying the potential problem with homebrew, Sony initiated a system update war that is still raging today. Predictably the canny homebrews are always finding new ways to downgrade their firmware, by exploiting bugs in games or installing modchips. But will the homebrew war spill out onto the Playstation 3? Sony certainly hopes not.



SONY SAYS SIZE MATTERS

PS3 downloadable games ten times bigger than Xbox 360

NOT only should you be excited about the prospect of having your very own virtual arcade on your PS3, but also at the prospect of being able to download games ten times the size of any available on Xbox Live Arcade. In a recent interview with FiringSquad John Hight, director of external development at SCE Santa Monica, confirmed that not only will PS3 owners be able to download remakes of classic titles but there will be scope for much more. This is due to the increased download size of Sony's 'e-Distribution Initiative'. Hight asserted that while third-party publishers will undoubtedly provide updated versions of classic games, Sony will not prohibit developers producing games that exceed 50 MB of storage space like Live does.

Live Arcade's 50MB limit is in place so that downloaded games can fit onto memory cards; but the top-spec PS3 boasts a bigger hard drive so Sony can afford to be a more generous with its allotment of space. Hight said, "We set a limit of 500MB to keep download times reasonable, but since we've got plenty of hard drive space we can accommodate even bigger games and a lot of them." The PS store already boasts games that exceed the 50Mb mark, such as *Blast Factor* but no third-party publishers have announced their plans for downloadable titles on the PS Network yet. Nevertheless, if Sony keeps a close watch on content and download times, this allocation of space could give the PS3 a valuable edge online.

next3 media
the BIG screen

High-definition gaming at its best

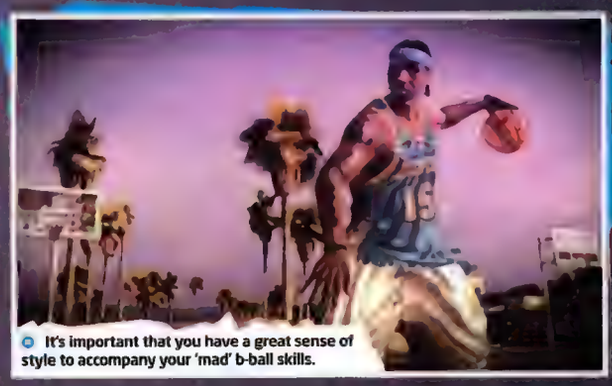
WHASSUP HOMIE?

NBA STREET HOMECOURT

OUT: TBA

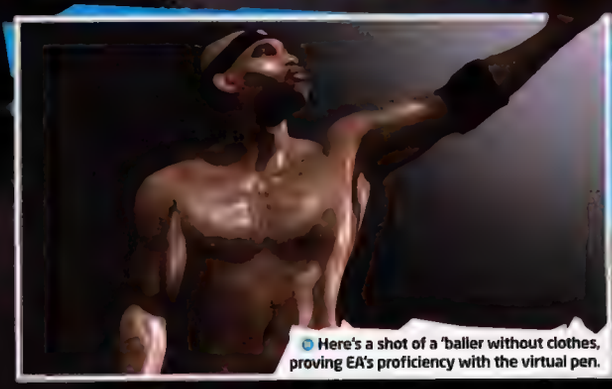
ABOUT// Home courts are – according to EA's slowly rumbling marketing machine at least – where legends are made. EA would say that though, as the latest in its *NBA Street* series is based around 'ballers' experiences away from the high life and professional courts. Following the same trusted formula of 'take your 'baller/learn' from nobodies to the top of the heap' formula, *Homecourt* doesn't immediately set out its stall as something different in the genre, offering only a tweaked control system and some sexy new animation to draw you in.

That said, this is one of the finest-looking games on the PS3, and with the promise of some outrageous tricks, dunks and shots, fans of the series will no doubt be drooling like a St Bernard over these screens.



It's important that you have a great sense of style to accompany your 'mad' b-ball skills.

Look at our 'baller slam-dunking the funk! He must have been a fan of *Funhouse*.



Here's a shot of a 'baller without clothes, proving EA's proficiency with the virtual pen.

newsflashes

TEN PER-CENTERS

A recent tot up of the amount of PS3s on sale via eBay, at time of writing, has revealed that - unlike the horrendous shortage of Xbox 360's at launch, rocketing the price of the units up to over $12,000 - there are over 29,000 PS3s for sale around the world on eBay. This explains the relatively low price, with some fetching less than $1,200. On the US launch day, even more were listed, with the upper limit standing at the 36,000 point - almost ten per cent of the launch allocation.

EGDF? SOMEONE'S ALPHABET IS OUT A BIT

Over 15,000 videogame development workers are to join the European Games Developers Federation in a unification of numerous regional bodies that will promote the European videogames industry. The syndicates involved include bodies from right across Europe with Denmark's Producktforeningen, Finland's Neogames, GAME from Germany and Austria, and our very own Tiga. All this means you can look forward to a more prolific and powerful European development scene.

European Games Developer Federation

IRONY-ING OUT PROBLEMS

Former US Vice Presidential candidate, John Edwards has been singed by an irony that can't help but make us smile. Edwards, who has been lobbying against Wal-Mart's poor treatment of its employees, had someone try to push the retail giant for a PS3 without having to stand in line. Thankfully, for the side of truth and justice, he didn't manage it. According to his office, the incident was to do with a misunderstanding between his wife and someone in his office. Sure, pal. Sure it was.

New York times down on PS3

START SPREADING THE NEWS

SETH Schiesel, New York Times' gaming correspondent has given his hands-on verdict of the PS3, and the prognosis for Sony is 'not good'. The gregarious games journalist has expressed his discontent with the machine, citing numerous comparative failures as the reason Sony's PS3 will ultimately come second, or even third in the console war.

Schiesel notes that the PS3 doesn't yet allow for customisable in-game soundtracks (true), the wireless controllers are not entirely wireless (not true), downloading takes too long and doesn't allow you to play games during the download (true), all in addition to the fact that there's no unified friends list (not true). This combination of factors, says the correspondent, are indicative of Sony's move away from absolute user friendliness of the likes of the Walkman and Trinitron brands, signalling the loss of leadership in key markets to the likes of Apple and Microsoft.

If we are honest, we suspect there is much cynicism for cynicism's sake here, and many of the issues raised by what could well be one of the most widely read papers in the world, are a little niggly for a system that has only just been released and is due for regular updates.

Noting only two high points, namely the multiplayer in *Resistance* and downloadable *Blast Factor*, Schiesel's report is, in our opinion, both naive and a little over simplified. He seems to value ease of use over everything else, when menu ergonomics are something as subjective as controller preferences.

AFTERTHOUGHT

TACOS FOR LIFE

Taco Bell really, really want a PS3

THE PS3 seems to have a strong affiliation with food at the minute, perhaps it has something to do with how easy your fingerprints find themselves on the sexy black casing. In a rather bizarre (and unprofitable) move, Taco Bell, the Mexican food giant, is offering free tacos for life to anyone who gives the company a PS3.

This isn't quite what it seems: Taco Bell isn't attempting to get a massive quesadilla LAN party going, what it's actually trying to do is raise awareness for the Boys And Girls Club Of America, an organisation that promotes "a sense of competence, usefulness, belonging and influence" in the youth of America.

The first person to donate a Playstation 3 to the charity will receive a lifetime's worth of tacos from the giant fast food joint, although eating tacos every day of your life could well see your lifespan shortened significantly.

In a slightly more bizarre story, two rather wacky guys have ripped apart their PS3 and turned in into a grill. Yes, you heard it, James Kingham and Brendan Foley, two clearly insane Americans are demolishing a shiny new PS3 and replacing the innards with a hot plate and asking supporters of the cause to donate $250. The craziest thing is that they've already got $55 of the money they need.

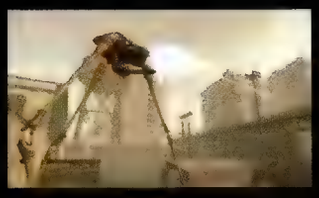
In similar news, a toasted cheese sandwich with a free PS3 is being sold on ebay, with the seller promising the winner a new console, should the bidding price go above $10,000.

6 THINGS WE LOVE

6 things we love about...

Half Life 2

RISE AND SHINE, DR FREEMAN



1 // Half Life: Sourceful A straight-to-PS3 port of *Half Life 2* minus the low Xbox frame rate issues would have been more than enough. But now we're getting *HL2*, *Episode 1* and *2*, *Portal* and *Team Fortress* in one package. Unbelievable.

2 // Attaboy! Valve may have put considerable time into perfecting a clearly emotive Alyx, but Dog is still our favourite character in the *Half Life 2* universe – expressing so much through his actions with that little red eye of his.

3 // Defying gravity *Half Life 2*'s Gravity Gun remains one of the best weapons in a modern shooter to-date. Having to test it by playing catch with Dog is likely going to stay in your affections for years to come.

4 // Citadel tour Everyone knows of *Half Life*'s historic opening, whether they've played it or not. *Half Life 2* features a similar moment that far exceeds that of the original. It's one of many amazing and memorable set pieces littered throughout the *HL2* games.

5 // Saucier Source Thanks to the power of Playstation 3, Valve apparently had to re-develop aspects of the Source engine to increase its potential. You can expect *Half Life 2* itself to look even better than any versions you may have played so far.

6 // G-Man gives! There's no denying how popular the G-Man is. He's so mysterious that whole forums and websites have been created and are debating his character. *Episodes 1*, *2* and – ultimately – *3* will finally reveal answers pertaining to just who, or what, he is.

JUST ANNOUNCED NEW GAMES

GRIMSQUAD: ENDLESS WARFARE

THE WHAT// This game has been waiting in the wings for some time now, but has only now peeped its head through the curtain. Rumoured to be the work-in-progress of *Killzone* developer Guerrilla Games (although Sony has denied these claims) *Grimsquad* is a squad-based shooter that focuses on covering and flanking attacks. According to reports, the campaign is designed with co-op play in mind as four players work in a team, this number increases when you take the game online where up to 24 dogs of war can plug each other with bullets. The game is said to be 40 per cent complete and could even be released in time for the European launch.

THE WHO// Anyone who's had the pleasure of playing *Killzone*, or more recently *Killzone: Liberation* on the PSP will testify that Guerrilla Games know its shooters and if it is involved with this project, it will bring a great deal of experience to the table. Before signing an exclusive deal with Sony, Guerrilla developed the 'shocking' *Shellshock: Nam'67* for Eidos; a fact it probably wishes had been left sloshing around in the paddy fields of Vietnam. Away from the battlefield, Guerrilla (formerly Lost Boys Games) was responsible for several Game Boy titles like *Rhino Rumble*. However, this could all be moot if what Sony says is true and *Grimsquad* is not a GG project.

HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF

THE WHAT// As inevitable as death and taxes is the return of the specky sorcerer Harry Potter in the game to accompany the film that is based on the book. Predictably, the game sees you 'pottering' about in the grounds of Hogwarts, waging war with Lord Voldemort and having strange and confusing feelings about Ron Weasley.

THE WHO// EA's developing it again and claim to be creating the most immersive *Harry Potter* experience to date. With every new *Potter* iteration, the team is perfecting the formula and encouraged by the surprisingly playable *Goblet Of Fire, Order Of The Phoenix* on the Playstation 3 could win over more than a few sceptics.

TOM CLANCY'S GRAW 2

THE WHAT// After simultaneously driving Ubisoft's profits through the roof on the Xbox 360, *GRAW* finally has a sequel confirmed. Taking place on the border between Mexico and America, both battles and locales should be much more varied. Ubisoft has revealed that development is already underway, so if all goes well, it could arrive in time for the PS3's launch.

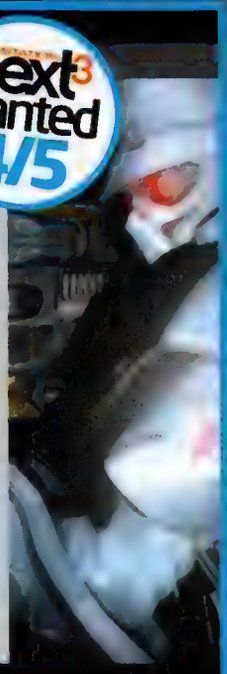
THE WHO// Though it is yet to be officially confirmed, we presume *GRAW 2* will by developed by the same internal team that did such a stellar job on the original. With games like *Assassin's Creed, Rainbow Six Vegas* and *BIA: Hell's Highway* also etched on the 2007 release list, it looks as though Ubisoft is set to make a big splash on the PS3.

NEOGEO CLASSICS

THE WHAT// No doubt inspired by the success of the recent Live arcade release of *Street Fighter II Hyper Fighting*, it has been announced that a range of NeoGeo classics, such as *King Of Fighters* will be available to download via the PS store. The final line-up is yet to be confirmed, but we do know that, at the time of press, it's the PS3 and not the 360 that's offering them.

THE WHO// When it comes to NeoGeo games there's sure to be a range of solid developers, but studios like SNK are going to feature prominently. We presume only the most popular titles will sit on the Store's virtual shelves, so all the developers have already proved themselves worthy, which means you'd be foolish not indulge.

Keeping you bang up-to-date with all the latest game announcements on Playstation 3



next3 wanted 4/5

THE GOOD// Sony's worldwide studios boss Phil Harrison has recently implied that *Killzone* on Playstation 3 will exceed expectations, so if *Grimsquad* does follow suit, we could be in for a double whammy of excellence. Being on the PS3 it will be pumped full of polygons and impressive particle effects. As we understand, characters in the game will wear armour that is divided into 15 separate parts that each get destroyed when they are damaged. As in *Killzone*, the squad will have to protect Earth from an evil extraterrestrial race, this time known as the Lomack.

THE BAD// As game specifics are scant, there aren't many faults to pick at the moment; however, our major concern is the mystery surrounding both developer and publisher. While Sony claims that Guerrilla has nothing to do with the game, it is yet to deny it will be responsible for publishing *Grimsquad*. Another worry is the plot; the whole 'alien invasion' angle sounds very similar to about a hundred other games we've played already, so we hope it isn't just another take on what the likes of *Killzone* and *Gears Of War* have already achieved.

THE PHOENIX

next3 wanted 2/5

THE GOOD// While high-def visuals and stunning scores are certainly a selling point, the most exciting aspect of the game has got to be the storyline. With J.K Rowling's narrative getting darker with every new book this could be more suited to a mature gamer.

THE BAD// *Order Of The Phoenix* is being developed over at least eight different platforms, including last-gen formats. We just hope the PS3 will be the lead platform and the others will be shrunk to fit. Giving us a jazzed-up version of the PS2 game just won't cut it.

next3 wanted 3/5

THE GOOD// The core shooter action will be kept in tact, but some elements are undergoing changes. This includes torrential rain falling unexpectedly during gameplay, causing you to change your tactics. Then there's the sharper AI, improved Cross-Com system and new online modes to look forward to as well.

THE BAD// *GRAW* remains a firm favourite on Xbox Live, and where you find lots of explosions and senseless violence, you'll often encounter a few idiots. So if it follows the tradition on the PS Network, look forward to being shot in the head and called a "gay" every half second.

next3 wanted 3/5

THE GOOD// Where do we start? The NeoGeo has a long lineage of arcade excellence. Expect the likes of *King Of Fighters*, *Metal Slug* and *Samurai Shodown* to make a appearance. In terms of 2D action it's hard to fault these games, so get your arcade sticks primed and best button-bashing finger ready.

THE BAD// While retro games make a nice addition to your collection, we can't imagine they'll make your PS3 break a sweat. As long as they remain inexpensive downloads comprising of quality material rather than lazy old-school compilations, we'll be happy.

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Everything you need to know broken into numerical factoids

0 Number of PS3s allowed to be sold on eBay.co.uk before March

1 Ubisoft PS3 game cancelled

1.5 Attach rate for Playstation 3 games in the US

2 Number of exclusives lost to the Xbox 360 this month

3 People handed free PS3s on launch day

4 People shot in PS3 BB gun drive-by

20 Number of PS3 games currently being developed by Take-Two

24 Pairs of limited edition PS3 Nike trainers made

29 Per cent increase in sales of PSP since the PS3 launched

100 number of PS3 units being sold by Japanese gamer Eiji

240 Amount in pounds Sony is losing on every 20GB PS3 sold

420 MBs of padding files on the *Resistance* Blu-ray disk

1,200 Price in US dollars NoveDataCom were charging for a guaranteed PS3

4,010 USD paid for a pair of the limited edition PS3 trainers

12,500 Taco Bell Bucks offered for one PS3

88,400 PS3s sold in Japan in the first week on sale

400,000 Estimated number of PS3s available for the US launch

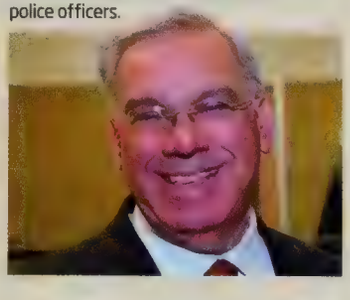
1,000,000 Number of PS3s Sony hopes to have shipped by the end of 2006

2,000,000 Number of PS3s supposedly assigned for the European launch

newsflashes

BOSTON SUES FOR 'CRAZED GAMER'

We all know that we can get a little worked up about the launch of a new console, and the PS3's delay has had us all more than a tad hot under the collar with the withholding of launch details and allocations until the last minute. Boston mayor, Thomas Menino is looking to take action against this unnecessary and potentially dangerous withholding of information by retailers Sony Style, saying it caused a number of teenagers to become crazed, wasting the time of twelve police officers.



WAL-MART DOES THE RIGHT THING

Michael Penkala, resident of Webster in Massachusetts, and PS3 would-be, was shot by gunmen looking to collectively mug an entire line of PS3 buyers. This is undoubtedly a terribly sad story, but thankfully Penkala wasn't seriously hurt and the lucky sod even received a PS3 courtesy of those friendly folk at Wal-Mart.

WAL★MART
ALWAYS LOW PRICES.
Always.

NICE IDEA

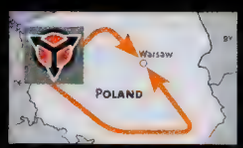
This month Japanese fantasy-strategy aficionados, Idea Factory released first details regarding its debut PS3 title called *Mist Of Chaos*. Slated for release this February, *MOC* is the next chapter in the *Neverland* series and is set in Ades – a land shrouded in mystery and mist, funnily enough. Split into three separate kingdoms, your goal is to unite them all using a mix of strategic gameplay and glorious battle; however, we haven't quite worked out where all the chaos comes in yet.

KILLZONE IS GREAT!

Harrison says nex-gen Killzone exceeds expectations

IN a recent interview, Sony corporate executive Phil Harrison has been waxing lyrical about the state of the titles currently in development at Sony studios around the world. Having previously talked about the forty or so titles being worked on at the moment, the Sony bod was whetting our appetites with early promises of just how great *Killzone 2* is going to be. Of course, in the normal course of events we would disregard this completely; however, with a point of reference – namely the outstanding E3 demo – to go by, his assurance that the game "exceeds" much of what was seen in that demo is quite an exciting prospect. While the action in the trailer was somewhat disappointing, once we were made aware of the fact that the *Killzone* trailer was pre-rendered rather than real-time, we're sure that, given *MotorStorm*'s level of quality after a similar trailer, *Killzone 2* should be great in terms of FPS action.

There will be more information on the '*Halo* killer to end all *Halo* killers' in the first half of next year, so check back for further updates.



POLES APART

Original and best?

Despite receiving rather mixed reviews citing frame rate, heavy glitching, crashing and draw distance issues, the original *Killzone* still sells in abundance, being the most popular videogame in Poland on any format.

RECORD YOUR SKILLS

PS3 to feature video-grabbing technology

THE PS3, already a hugely versatile piece of kit, is set to receive yet another addition to its functionality: that of a video grabber. Okay, so you won't immediately be able to shoot sections of gameplay from any title, and the technology is software based, but the idea of distributing your favourite *PES* goal or *Tekken* juggle combo is something that we'd all like to see.

In a recent interview with the Sony 'bloggers for hire', Threespeech, Phil Harrison made his intentions clear for the future of such technology, encouragingly saying "We're actually already working on it now." According to the Sony boss there are two ways about the problem. The most simple of the two, the real-time capture and distribution of video from the console is deemed to be an inefficient method; however, the recording of button input, the approach chosen by Sony, seems to be the way forward. It hasn't yet been revealed which game will be using this functionality first, but you can pretty much guarantee that once the technology is out here, developers will be clamoring to shoehorn it into games.

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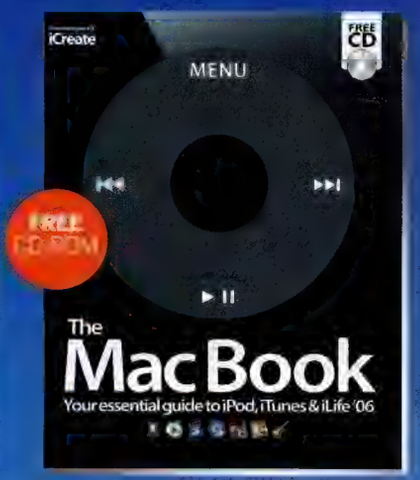

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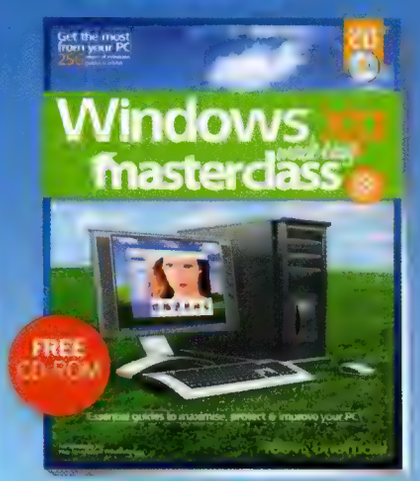

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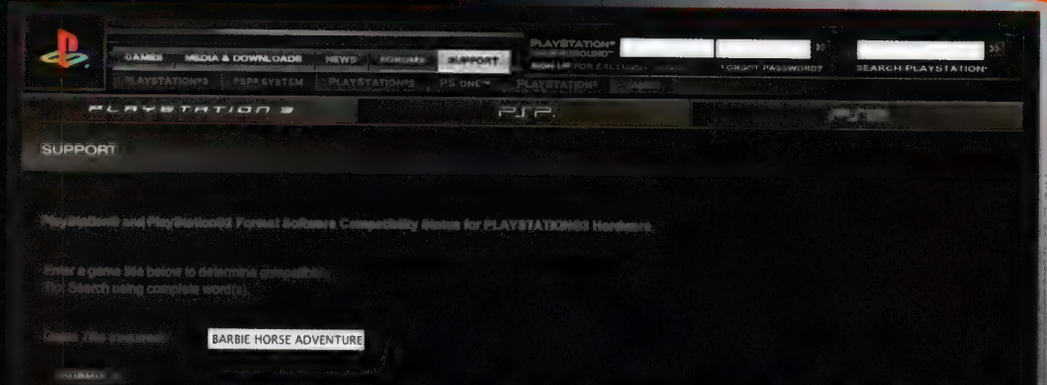
IMAGINE PUBLISHING

the hot3 list

THE TEN BEST HAPPENINGS THIS MONTH

TEN OF THE HAPPIEST GOINGS-ON IN THE WORLD OF PS3



COMPAT ON THE BACK

01

If you're wondering which of your old PS games to hang on to, or trade in for 50p – check out the new backward compatibility site that Sony has launched. Its search engine enables you look for any PSone or PS2 game to see if it's backward compatible, if it has any problems running and if so, what they are. Sony has promised to resolve all problems with a patch as soon as possible, but until then go to http://www.us.playstation.com/Support/CompatibleStatus

SONY BONDING

02

This month we got to go and see the new Bond movie, and our verdict? Pretty good on the whole: good Bond, good Bond girl boobage, but not enough explosions for our liking. But the element that brought the biggest smile to our face was the scandalous amount of Sony product placement throughout the entire movie. Yes, we know Sony Pictures made the film but that doesn't mean we have to see Bond fiddling with his Sony Ericsson, M tracking terrorists on her brand new Vaio and hotels recording security footage on Blu-ray. We honestly expected to see James taking down a swarm of Chimera on his PS3 at any moment. Product worship aside, the combination of *Bond*'s opening weekend and the PS3 launch did at least help to put some money back into the Sony pot.

BARGAIN HUNTER

03

Though the news that Sony is losing hundreds of pounds on every PS3 sold isn't too encouraging, at least it proves what value for money the Playstation 3 really is. With components totalling £200 over the retail price, Sony is taking a big risk on this and now the console is in stores, consumers are finally getting the opportunity to spend a little time with this 'engineering masterpiece'. Not our words, the words of isuppli.com.

KILLZONE IS KILLER

04

People laughed when they saw the E3 trailer for *MotorStorm* and said the game could never look that good, but with every new build it's looking more and more like the stunning filth fest shown last summer. That's why we believe spokesman Phil Harrison when he says the new *Killzone* 'exceeds' its trailer. According to recent reports from the developer, Killzone is costing more to make than the most expensive (Dutch) film ever made. The £10 million budget is due to the labour-intensive development of next-gen games. High-def Helghast, we can't wait.

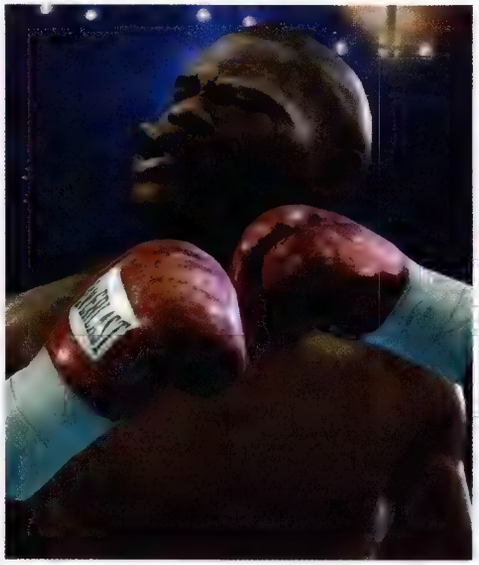
RETAIL UNIT AND BLU-RAYS ARRIVE

05

We have a lot of things to thank Japan for: sushi, ninja skills, cheeky cosplay schoolgirls and now a Playstation 3 retail unit. Eager not to be left out, we bagged ourselves a 20GB PS3 unit and a selection of games to ensure we're ready to face the action-hungry hordes online. To our surprise without the silver strip the 20GB looks somewhat sleeker than our 60 gig and the mini Blu-ray boxes are oh, so sexy. There're like DVD boxes but smaller and more stylish – the Kylie to DVD's Danni.

06 BRICKING IT

It's good to see the arrival of the PS3 isn't ruffling any feathers at Microsoft HQ. After Japanese sales figures were released showing that during the launch week the PS3 outsold the Xbox 360 by 77,775 units. Bill Gates hit back by saying that "Sony could make 80,000 bricks an people would buy them." Unfortunately for Mr Gates, the PS3 is more a powerhouse than a brick and besides if anyone did want a brick surely they need only pick up the original Xbox.



07 PS3 IN THE USA

Okay, we're all disappointed it's not in Europe but after all those months of hype it's good to finally have the PS3 on the shelves, or more accurately flying off them. It wasn't the most well-organised, good-natured or ground breaking console launch we've ever experienced, but with a severe shortage of units Sony wasn't going to make a song and dance about it. The first machines were snapped up within a matter of minutes and Sony assures both US and Japanese gamers that new supplies are being shipped in 'on a constant basis'. The launch also had a knock-on effect for other Playstation products like the PSP and PS2. Bonus.

08 ONLINE AT LAST

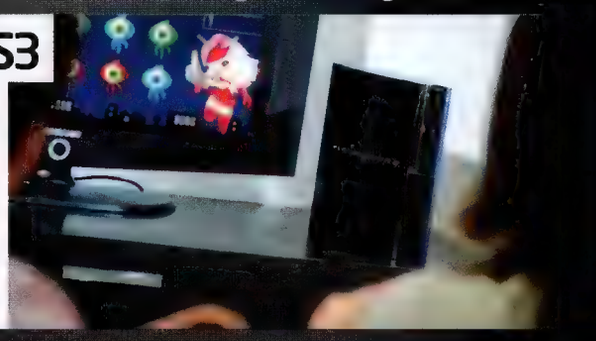
After years of having to listen to our Xbox-loving cronies crow on about the joys of Live gaming, we finally got to take our PS3 on her maiden voyage online. Apart from a few kinks still left to be worked out, the service delivered everything it promised; simple to connect, straightforward to navigate and best of all sending hilarious 'cock' jokes to people on your Buddy list is effortless.

09 TWENTY SOMETHING

While other publishers are getting splinters from too much fence-sitting, games publisher Take 2 has come out in support of the PS3 saying that it has over 20 top games ready to ship or in development. Its big hitters include the likes of *GTA IV* and new crime thriller *L.A. Noire*, but it's also offering updates of its 2K sports franchise, *The BIGS* and a little game called The Darkness. Take 2 can now be added to the list of big-name publishers like Ubisoft and EA who are looking to saturate the PS3 market with new and ever-so-exciting IP in the coming months.

10 YOU, ME AND PS3

Everyone has a different idea about what makes a good game but if the words of SCE boss Phil Harrison are to be believed we could soon have the chance to prove it. By embedding creation tools into game applications, user-created content will have a big part to play in the PS3's future. So if you're sitting on the next triple-A game, it's time to start penning the script, creating characters and hiring Michael Madsen to voice act.



RUMOUR CONTROL

Fact or fiction... you decide

1 ONE IN TWO MILLION. According to a prominent high-street videogame retailer, before the delay announcement Sony had planned to ship 2 million PS3 consoles into the UK before 31 December 2006.

RATING 2/5

■ This sounds like a very dubious figure to us as neither the Americans or Japanese got anything like this amount of units. Such a large figure suggests that Europe was going to be the principal launch territory, but was dropped like an ugly girlfriend at the first sniff of a shortage.

This retailer also says it expects a similarly beefy number to arrive in March when the PS3 finally launches here, but that's a mite too optimistic for us.

2 LATE LAUNCH. Due to shortages in US and Japan, the PS3 will not lunch in Europe until May or worst still, next Christmas.

RATING 3/5

■ This old chestnut again, with every machine being snapped up on day one in both launch territories this rumour is cropping more and more often. Despite the fact people like Phil Harrison are refusing to guarantee the March launch date Sony says that PS3 production is going well it is on target, but like Sony we're bottling it as well and won't say it will definitely arrive on time - it's been delayed once, who's to say it won't happen again.

3 PS3 HUNDRED. A Japanese consumer named Eiji has managed to bag himself 100 PS3s and is planning to auction them all off for a mammoth profit.

RATING 2/5

■ Hmm, unless this guy is a genuine ninja master we wonder just how Eiji managed to get 100 PS3s when gamers who queued up for days could only get one. If he actually does have all those consoles, we'll know soon enough as he'll be racing up the world rich list at record speed.

4 EPAY. A 60GB PS3 has sold for a million trillion dollars on eBay.

RATING 1/5

■ Okay maybe not that much, but people are always willing to pay an exorbitant rate to get something they want, but the influx of PS3s on eBay seems to have worked against sellers on this occasion with units going for a mere few hundreds dollars over their retail price.

5 NEVER REGIONS. The Playstation 3 isn't region free.

RATING 2/5

■ There is at least an element of truth here, while you can play PS3 games from any region on your Pal PS3, when it comes to DVDs and PSone/PS2 games they are still region locked and will only play on the machine region they were made for.

Q&A

GEORGE P. GEORGEADIS

Founder of Dreamgazers Interactive and creative director talks to us about life as an independent developer in the next generation

INFORM
Name: GEORGE P. GEORGEADIS
Company: DREAMGAZERS INTERACTIVE
Role: PRESIDENT/ CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Tell us three words that best describe your game.

Silent Hill meets *The Never Ending Story*

What is the storyline of *Dreamers*?

Dreamers is a game about a young man in his twenties (Jorge) that suffers from a bizarre form of narcolepsy. He experiences sudden and uncontrollable attacks of deep sleep, sometimes accompanied by paralysis and hallucinations, which can occur at anytime and anywhere. More importantly, they cause him to experience dreams from which he might never wake.

Tell us a little about the team's history and this new endeavour

Well, prior to forming Dreamgazers Interactive, I personally used to be involved with a different development company for a couple of years. Even so, when things started rolling for Dreamgazers I have to admit I was (and still am) very overwhelmed with the number of "hats" that I have to wear everyday and I find myself switching from writer, to modeller, web designer, director to suddenly businessman, all the while still having a day job to pay the bills. Soon afterwards, thankfully, I wasn't alone. I was blessed with the support of many talented individuals.

How difficult has it been to develop for next-gen consoles?

The expectations are really high right now. With production values, quality control and budgets matching those found in the film industry and with gamers expecting their games to take full advantage of their brand new next-gen hardware, it definitely has put a lot of pressure on the independent developer. That is why you will notice we have such a big casual-games industry now because most independent developers start there.

Do you think realistic representations of the world impact greatly on the experience delivered by next-gen games?

Like I said earlier, I believe now gamers expect nothing less than the best. However, that can mean many things, since it heavily depends on what the gamer is after. Some of the titles that have been highly successful this year actually didn't offer the best in the world of visuals, which tells us that gamers are looking for the best overall experience. Good graphics may attract us to a game, but if the game is not fun to play, we often find ourselves moving on to the next one.

Dreamers looks to be a very different title to what you might expect of a videogame, are you worried you might alienate the more traditional gamers out there?

Alienation is part of the key to our salvation. I strongly believe gamers are hungry for something different. As an industry we tend to stick with the familiar until we try something new, that is, then it's way to late to go back.

Do you think motion-sensing technology adds to the gaming experience or is it just a gimmick?

We're all about breaking the mould and I am so excited to see Nintendo and Sony laying the foundation for developers to be able to create new experiences. Developers can have the wildest ideas, but it helps when the hardware can support them.

How do you see the development of physical storage media? Would you prefer to work on a download basis or disc formats?

With internet connections getting faster and faster I think the download path is inevitable. Not so sure if I would prefer it to physical storage media (as a collector), but as a developer I believe it makes sense.

Is next-gen game development only for the big boys?

It may seem that way at first and it certainly has become more difficult for smaller developers during the last few years, but I anticipate the tables to turn. With budgets sky-rocketing and the really limited selection of 'good' games on shelves these days, I believe the innovation and fresh ideas of smaller developers will become essential and publishers will shift their focus to the little guys.

newsgrid

GOOD, BAD, EXPECTED, UNEXPECTED – LET'S PUT THE NEWS IN CONTEXT!

MAPPING OUT THE MONTH'S NEWS ON GRAPH PAPER. BECAUSE WE CAN

GOOD

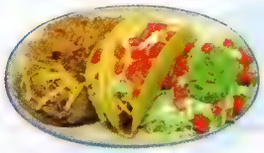
BAD

UNEXPECTED

EXPECTED

TACO BELL OFFER FREE TACOS FOR LIFE

We love tacos, and the news that Taco Bell is giving away free tacos for life to the first person that donates their PS3 to the charity organisation The Girls And Boys Clubs Of America is great for us. We've only got two PS3's in the office now.



RECORD FOOTAGE ON PS3

While you won't be able to record actual footage to rip to DVD and watch at your leisure, the PS3 will record inputs, allowing you to disseminate it around the world and show off your favourite combos.

ALBUM ART RIPPED

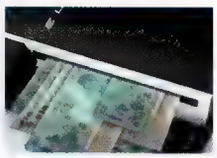
Those who want to use their PS3 as more than just a games machine will be pleased to learn that when ripping your music collection to the hard drive, the PS3 will download and add the album art if it can be located. Not that useful, but a nice touch nonetheless.

HOMEBREW ON PS3

The news that the first batch of PS3 hackers are well on their way to cracking the big black box is a little worrying, as if the homebrew and emulation scene gets of the ground, it could well affect the amount of downloadable content. Maybe.

SONY LOSING MONEY ON EVERY CONSOLE SOLD

Latest estimates guess at Sony losing around $300 per unit sold. While this may seem impossible, it's more than likely, as due to the brand new Blu-ray technology, production costs are sky-high at the moment.



VIOLENCE AT LAUNCH

The frenzied launch led to an awful lot of issues what with folk getting shot, mugged and robbed up left, right and centre. However, none of this is the fault of Sony, as where there's money there'll always be crime.

Versus! Best ladies' man

SUB ZERO

I've always said that, cold blooded fighter has an eternal thirst but only to be with the ladies to a point of his own blood – but can he win the ladies over without killing them?

Serenade	3	10	**Serenade**
Yeah, perhaps not his strongest suit, Sub Zero's collection of love songs probably starts and ends with *Ice, Ice baby*. Not a winner with the ladies, or anyone else for that matter.			Surely Barry is amongst the world's best serenaders (if that's a word). With soul classics like *Let the Music Play* and *Your Sweetness is My Weakness*, how could you not be bowled over?
Cocktails	4	8	**Cocktails**
While we're sure the ladies would appreciate his frozen margaritas, one too many of them could well give you an ice cream headache and headaches are no good for lovin'.			Barry is no doubt a master of the cocktail shaker – well, you'd have to be looking like that – so he's bound to have a few sure-fire ladykillers in his cocktail repertoire.
Grooming	8	8	**Grooming**
Those cold blue eyes are no doubt a winner with the girls, and he's never going to be caught short for something to shave within the netherworld.			Mr White was always impeccably dressed and turned out, and despite his rather sizable girth was never without a lady or two.
Night out	7	9	**Night out**
We're sure this heartless killer has plenty to talk about with the ladies, we're just not sure that the netherworld has too many nice Italian restaurants, that's all.			First a little dinner, then move on to a disco for some soul boogying before sliding back to a penthouse suite in the Hilton for some gooood lovin'. Who wouldn't?
Bedroom	2	3	**Bedroom**
This is where it all gets a little uncomfortable for Sub Zero, if the girl manages to make it through the night, some intense mothering issues means she's unlikely to leave with her spine intact.			Donning his white satin bathrobe and sashaying toward the bed to the sounds of *Never, never gonna give you up*, we imagine most girls would probably faint with ecstasy or at very least fright.
OVERALL	24	38	**OVERALL**

BARRY WHITE

The greatest singer of his day? Sure he's had a couple of years where he's been a little heavy on the sauce, but you'll be hard pushed to find a man who's been more successful with the ladies.

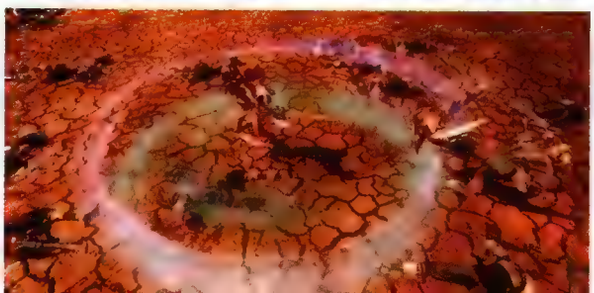
the next3Gen

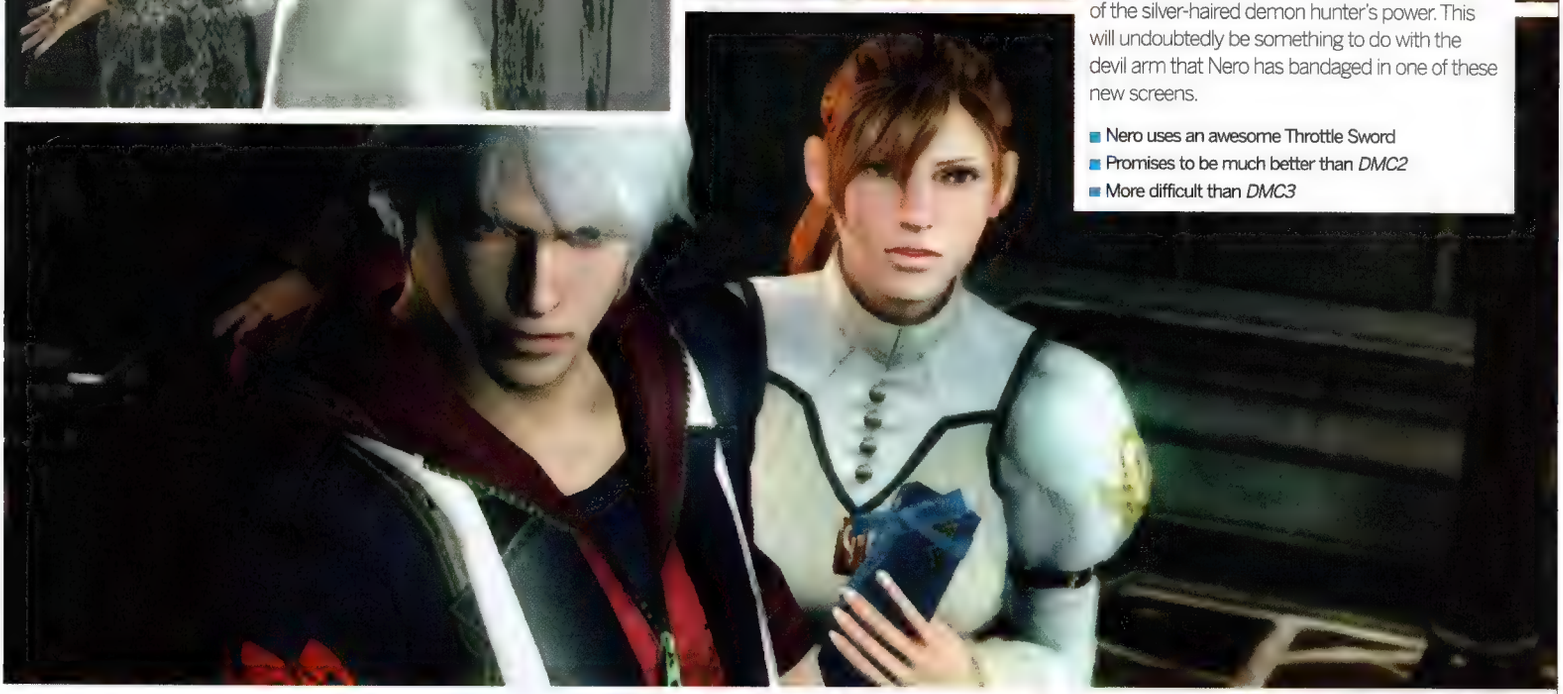
ALL THE LATEST NEW SHOTS AND INFORMATION ON THE GAMES THAT REALLY MATTER

HEAVENLY SWORD

Heavenly Sword is all about being the kickinest bitch around. Past that there's not much more to complicate matters, but we've seen a few bits and pieces that might tickle your fancy, and these new screens should get you baying for the blood of those evil goons.

- Three different stances for maxium combo goodness
- Andy Serkis involved with every stage of development
- Super-stylish finishers





DEVIL MAY CRY 4

We're getting a better idea of how the relationship between Dante and Nero is going to work out, as it appears as if Nero has somehow stolen some of the silver-haired demon hunter's power. This will undoubtedly be something to do with the devil arm that Nero has bandaged in one of these new screens.

- Nero uses an awesome Throttle Sword
- Promises to be much better than *DMC2*
- More difficult than *DMC3*

FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3

Sure, this will be rather like its 360 brother, but the little graphical tweaks and gameplay enhancements should see it stand out as the finest boxing title ever made. We also think the PS3 pad is better suited to the innovative Total Punch Control system than the 360's. Keep an eye on this one, it's our lock of the launch titles.

- Enhanced graphics, including even more realistic sweat. Soon it'll be so realistic, your TV will get wet.
- More comprehensive career mode and some more fight options
- Best-looking game on PS3

Helping you plan your gaming future

next3 releases

Find out when all the big Playstation 3 games are coming to a store

March 2007

Bladestorm: The Hundred Years' War	Koei
Blazing Angels	Ubisoft
Call Of Duty 3	Activision
Coded Arms Assault	Konami
The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	Ubisoft
Enchanted Arms	Ubisoft
Everybody's Golf	Sony
Fatal Inertia	Koei
F.E.A.R.	Vivendi
Full Auto 2: Battlelines	Sega
Formula One Champ Edition	Sony
Half-Life 2: Episode Two	EA
Heavenly Sword	Sony
Hellboy	Konami
Genji: Days Of The Blade	Sony
Gran Turismo HD	Sony
Madden NFL 07	EA
Marvel: Ultimate Alliance	Activision
Mobile Suit Gundam: Crossfire	Namco Bandai
MotorStorm	Sony
NBA Live 07	EA
Need For Speed Carbon	EA
Ninja Gaiden: Sigma	Tecmo
Rainbow Six Vegas	Ubisoft
Ridge Racer 7	Namco Bandai
Resistance: Fall Of Man	Sony
Sega Golf Club	Sega
Sega Rally	Sega
SingStar	Sony
Sonic The Hedgehog	Sega
Splinter Cell: Double Agent	Ubisoft
Stranglehold	Midway
The Darkness	2K Games
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07	EA
Tony Hawk's Project 8	Activision
Unreal Tournament 2007	Midway
Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom	Ubisoft
Virtua Fighter 5	Sega
Virtua Tennis 3	Sega
Warhawk	Sony

April 2007

Alone In The Dark	Atari
Armored Core 4	Sega
Colin McRae: DIRT	Codemasters
Elveon	10tacle Studios
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2	Ubisoft

May 2007

Avalon	Climax
Mercenaries 2: World In Flames	Pandemic
Tom Clancy's GRAW 2	Ubisoft

June 2007

Afrika	Sony
Battlefield: Bad Company	EA
Def Jam: Icon	EA
Devil May Cry 4	Capcom
Fifth Phantom Saga	Sega
Lair	Sony
Medal Of Honor: Airborne	EA

2 sense

Summing up games to the power of two

Rainbow Six Vegas
Six shooter

Colin McRae: DIRT
Rally dirty

Def Jam: Icon
Beat street

Blazing Angels
Winging it

Mobile Suit Gundam
Mechro sexual

GTA IV
Gangsta tripping

WarHawk
High flyer

Unreal Tournament
Big shot

Stuntman 2
Drive time

Final Fantasy XIII
Never ending

Ni-Oh	Koei
Romance Of The Three Kingdoms	Koei
Spider-Man 3	Activision
The Eye Of Judgement	Sony
The Wheelman	Midway

July 2007

Army Of Two	EA
Frontlines: Fuel Of War	THQ
Monster Madness	SouthPeak
Monster Kingdom: Unknown Realms	Sony
SKATE	EA
The Outsider	Frontier
TNA Wrestling	Midway
Untitled	Naughty Dog

August 2007

Golden Axe	Sega
HAZE	Ubisoft
House Of The Dead 4	Sega
NBA Street	EA
Parabellum	Acony
Stuntman 2	THQ
WarDevil: Enigma	Digi-Guys

September 2007

Clive Barker's Jericho	Codemasters
Burnout 5	EA
Dirty Harry	The Collective
Indiana Jones 2007	LucasArts
Metro 2033: The Last Refuge	4A-Games

NB All release dates correct at time of going to press. Release dates subject to change without notice.

Wanted on PS3

Here's one we'd like to see on our side of the fence sooner rather than later

Battlefield 2142 (PC)

Due to the level of success the franchise has enjoyed on PC and the 360, there's a good chance this will make it to the PS3. *Battlefield 2142* takes place at the dawn of a new ice age. The world's in widespread panic and you are one of two military superpowers fighting for control of the earth's resources. We can't wait!

next3team

WHO'S WAITING FOR WHAT...

EDITOR IN CHIEF
NICK JONES

MOST WANTED
METAL GEAR SOLID 4
ASSASSIN'S CREED
SEGA RALLY
MOTORSTORM
RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN

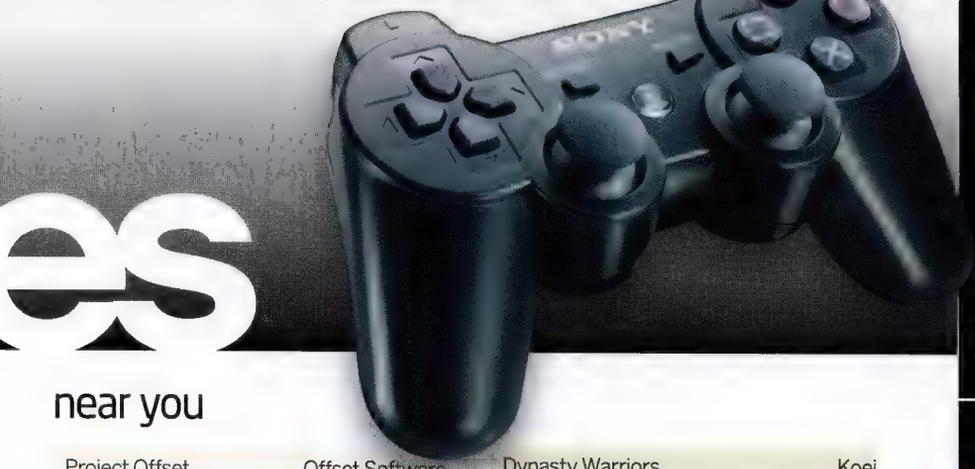
ART EDITOR
JAMES DAVIES

MOST WANTED
TONY HAWK'S PROJECT 8
MERCENARIES 2
RESIDENT EVIL 5
DEVIL MAY CRY 4
CALL OF DUTY 3

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
KEITH HENNESSEY

MOST WANTED
ARMY OF TWO
GRAW 2
LA NOIRE
KILLZONE
BURNOUT 5

Key game Liable to slip Could be dodgy



es

near you

Project Offset	Offset Software
Resident Evil 5	Capcom
The Club	Sega
The Wall	Play Ten
Tekken 6	Namco Bandai

October 2007

Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare	Activision
FIFA	EA
Getaway	Sony
Grand Theft Auto IV	Rockstar
Fall Of Liberty	Codemasters
Monster Hunter 3	Capcom
Pro Evolution Soccer 7	Konami

November 2007

After Burner	Sega
Assassin's Creed	Ubisoft
Brothers In Arms Hell's Highway	Ubisoft
Dynasty Warriors	Koei
Eight Days	Sony
Interstellar Marines	Zero Point Software
Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots	Konami
WWE SmackDown Vs. RAW	THQ

December 2007

Eyedentify	Sony
Killzone	Sony
Turok	Buena Vista Games

TBC 2008

Data-Fly	ORiGO
Dark Sector	D3 Publisher
Dreamers	Dreamgazers
Far Cry 2	Ubisoft
Final Fantasy XIII	Square Enix
Final Fantasy Versus XIII	Square Enix
Forbidden Siren 3	Sony
Harker	The Collective
Heavy Rain	Quantic Dream
Kuriyama	Grasshopper
LA Noire	Rockstar
Makai Wars	Nippon Ichi
Prince Of Persia 4	Ubisoft
Rain	Artoon
Ratchet & Clank	Sony
Rogue Warrior	Bethesda
Shin Megami Tensei 4	Atlus
Lord Of The Rings: The White Council	EA
White Knight Story	

next3 Essentials

Plan ahead for PS3's essential...

War Shooters

1 Call Of Duty 3
We are duty-bound to play Activision's awesome shooter.

2 Brother In Arms: Hell's Highway
On a highway to hell and we're going along for the ride.

3 Medal Of Honor: Airborne
It's not just MC Hammer who gets to wear parachute pants.

4 Battlefield: Bad Company
You'll be in good company with DICE's bullet-fest.

5 Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2
No details yet, but if it's anything like the original it should be shot hot.

YOUR TOP TEN

Join our forum and vote for your most-wanted PS3 games www.next3.co.uk/forum

FINAL FANTASY XIII
TEKKEN 6
RESIDENT EVIL 5
HAZE
METAL GEAR SOLID 4
ASSASSIN'S CREED
DEVIL MAY CRY 4
GTA IV
RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN
WARHAWK

STAFF WRITER
TOM LECLERC

MOST WANTED
FINAL FANTASY XIII
FORMULA ONE
GOLDEN AXE
TUROK
EIGHT DAYS

STAFF WRITER
CRAIG GILMORE

MOST WANTED
STRANGLEHOLD
THE DARKNESS
RESIDENT EVIL 5
CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO
INTERSTELLAR MARINES

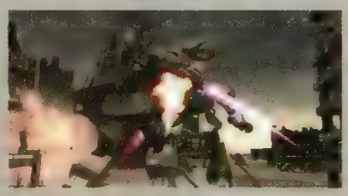
SUB EDITOR
SARAH SLEE

MOST WANTED
AFRIKA
SPIDER-MAN 3
VIRTUA TENNIS 3
SINGSTAR
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

newsflashes

500,000 OR BUST

Namco Bandai president Takeo Takasu has told Bloomberg it must sell over 500,000 units of its PS3 titles *Ridge Racer 7* and *Mobile Suit Gundam* before it even makes a profit. According to the report, the high-def graphics alone cost Namco one billion yen – more than twice the price it splashed out on its titles for the Wii. Predictably, both games sold well in Japan but if the company is pinning its financial future on games such as the woeful *Gundam*, there could be cause for concern.



HACK ATTACK

Normally a pursuit not encouraged by the games industry, random site Shimpinmori.net is hosting a hacking contest in an effort to test the security of the Playstation 3 and the version of Linux created for it. The clever hacker who manages to crack the PS3 code will be awarded a PS3 with pre-installed Linux, a HDMI cable and a copy of *Resistance*. Apparently the rules state it must be a 'clean' hack, if that means anything at all to you.

KIM JONG IL SO RONERY

It's no secret that America and North Korea have had their fair share of disagreements, but it looks like the US is preparing to fight dirty as the government plans to block shipments of popular consumer electronic goods to North Korea. That means no big-screen TVs, no MP3 players; but perhaps worst of all, no PS3s. The ban is targeted specifically at *Team America*'s favourite dictator Kim Jong IL who is famed for enjoying such electronic delights. Sorry Kim, you just got pwned.

Everyone's favourite dic-tator, Kim Jong IL as featured in *Team America*.

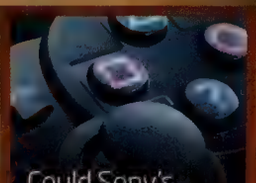
USERS TO TAKE THE LEAD

Sony confirms dedication to user-created content

IT'S the area that Phil Harrison is most excited about at the moment and clearly a future focal point for the Sony marketing team: user-created content. We suspect you're thinking along the lines of new maps, wallpapers, *SingStar* performances, the recently announced video content and tunes, but the plans seem to be going much, much further. Indeed, the very assertion that 'user content is key' says much about Sony's intention to allow a legitimate modding/homebrew scene in a way it tried its hardest to eradicate from the PSP fanbase.

The kind of user-based content suggested are things like AI behaviours and environments, amongst others, with specific focus being put on the user friendliness of the system. While entire games haven't been either implied or ruled out, we have had information that with the upcoming Yellow Dog Linux operating system, a service will be made available to garage developers to allow them access to development tools for the PS3 in a fashion similar to that offered by the Xbox 360's XNA Studio Express, that gives those who subscribe a chance to create their very own games.

Citing Linden Lab's hugely successful Second Life as the way forward in online content, Sony is betting its online farm on the hardcore PS3 community being sufficiently dedicated to create enough content to get the more casual gamer onboard.



Could Sony's online content emulate Second Life's impressive success?

As long as the tools are simple, the rewards significant and the user base large, Sony's aspiration to create a complex and revolutionary marketplace could well be successful. Our only concern comes with the traditionally sloppy approach to online services taken by Sony, which may well mean that getting your stuff uploaded could be a horrible, pointless nightmare.

AFTERTHOUGHT

OMFG PS3 SUXOR111111

WIKIPEDIA CLOSES PS3 AND WII ENTRIES

THE online encyclopaedia, Wikipedia, that enables anyone to contribute information has closed entries to its PS3 and Wii listings following a glut in fanboy vandalism. While few of the entries could be considered offensive, we found a few that offered uninformed opinion and conjecture such as "PS3 is better than Wii", the PS3 had "faulty firmware" and it "glitches when playing PSone games". Even though these statements may turn out to be true, according to Wikipedia they belong somewhere else. While it has completely removed any litigious or potentially defamatory comments, the majority can be accessed via the history tab in the entries – for anyone who has a little time on their hands.

Other famous acts of online fanboy vandalism include the company websites of both Nintendo and Microsoft being replaced by "Nintendo Sucks!!!!!!!!!1" and "Microsoft is Zomg T3h SuckOr!!!1-!!". Come on people, we know you like Sony, but really, this is a little juvenile.

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Pushing the plunger with the weight of opinion

LOSING EXCLUSIVES

Have delays cost Sony dearly?

DURING the days when the PS3 was still just a twinkle in Ken Kutaragi's eye it wasn't surprising to see a franchise or two cosying up with the Xbox 360, and why wouldn't they? For a year now if you wanted to release a next-gen game, Microsoft's was the only door you could go knocking on. However, now that the PS3 has launched, you would assume this migration of IP would all but cease. Unfortunately this is not the case, as last month saw Sony's new system lose two more so-called 'exclusives' to the Xbox 360.

When the PS3 was still riding the high of the US and Japanese launches, Koei, a PlayStation stalwart and a company frequently cited as key to gaining an edge in the next-gen war, announced that former PS3 exclusives *Fatal Inertia* and *Blade Storm* would also be released on the 360. With words like 'rat' and 'sinking ship' constantly being linked with the PS3 in almost every internet videogame forum, now is the time Sony is most in need of support; and while these two games might not be considered killer apps, when you take a look at the bigger picture, the move is fairly concerning. Sony has just entered into perhaps the most important stage in its illustrious industry, both its financial stability and reputation is at stake, next-gen console supremacy is by no means assured and it doesn't help when publishers begin to share your supposed 'exclusive content' with your closest rival. Koei is not the only publisher to be sleeping with the enemy, over the past few months Sony has been haemorrhaging games at an alarming rate; *Smackdown*, *Pro Evo 6*, *FIFA 07* and *Splinter Cell 5* have all been claimed by Microsoft within the past few months. Without explanation, Ubisoft has delayed the release of *Rainbow Six Vegas* for the PS3 until the end of January, making the shooter exclusive to the Xbox 360 over that vital holiday period.

With news of such delays, it didn't take long before people revisited the subject of the defection of premium IP like *Assassin's Creed* and *GTA IV* back in September. While many assumed the spoils were always supposed to be split between the two next-gen

"Last month saw Sony's new system lose two more so-called 'exclusives' to the Xbox 360"

DELAY CASUALTIES

PS3's loss is 360's gain

Smackdown Vs. Raw 2007
Once a gleaming star in Sony's console crown, *Smackdown* was due to make its next-gen debut on PS3; however, due to alleged development difficulties and perhaps the failure to 'finalise business terms' with third-party publishers, it's now part of the Xbox 360 stable. Then again, judging by THQ's latest offering, perhaps we can wait another year to play it.

Pro Evolution Soccer 6
After Microsoft's outlandish claim to 'own football', there was much debate as to whether or not *Pro Evo* was exclusive to the Xbox 360 for a year or for the rest of the year and is an issue that is yet to be resolved. The good news for PS3 owners, however, is that while *Pro Evo 6* was just an update using the same old engine, the version for PS3 is going to be the first true next-gen addition.

FIFA 07
No such confusion with EA's footie franchise we're afraid, this is definitely an Xbox 360 'next-generation' exclusive until at least late 2007, but that doesn't mean we won't get any *FIFA* fillers in between.

Splinter Cell 5
While *Double Agent* is appearing on Playstation 3 release lists, the next game in the *Splinter Cell* series will only be released on Xbox 360, a great coup for Microsoft - but haven't we played it all before?

consoles, a report by *Newsweek* suggests different. In the article, correspondent N'Gai Croal reports that both *Assassin's Creed* and *Grand Theft Auto IV* were always suppose to be PS3 exclusives, but due to Sony's heel dragging and production woes it lost out on the sole rights to two of next year's biggest games. "We learned that Take-Two and Rockstar Games were interested in continuing their long-time relationship with Sony, in which they premiered their *GTA* games on PS platforms exclusively for 6-12 months before bringing them to other systems." The article continues. "Also, Ubisoft was interested in making *Assassin's Creed*, due in stores next spring, exclusive to the PS3." With IP as valuable as this, surely Sony would have done everything in its power to hold onto them; however, according to *Newsweek* for the best part of a year Ken Kutaragi moved slower than snail in tar and "hadn't finalised the business terms for independent publishers on the PS3." Then to further compound the problem, "Playstation's Japanese headquarters was effectively radio silent, and without Kutaragi's signoff, the normally independent American and European branches had no authority to reach agreements on the exclusives they believed could be valuable to the PS3 cause."

A worrying state of affairs indeed, but surely one of Sony's top executives would have made some noise about losing the exclusivity of these titles; however, according to Sony's executive vice president, Jack Tretton, the decision to work with Microsoft was made by the publishers. "There was interest on Take-Two's part to bring *GTA* on to Xbox platforms. We wouldn't encourage them to do that. The interest came from them." Perhaps we're being a little naïve but there's a big difference between 'not encouraging' Rockstar to take *GTA* to Xbox, and giving them a good reason not to. Microsoft is said to have made the deals with Ubisoft and Take-Two extremely worthwhile.

If Sony's tardiness is the cause for the loss of these titles, who's to say it isn't responsible for losing other franchises? These deal delays could also be the reason for the lack of certain third-party online components, but this is merely speculation, what is certain is that with the loss of so many 'exclusive' software titles, Sony is playing catch-up and needs to produce some essential exclusives – which to its, credit it is carving out – or come up with an ingenious method to make gamers pay extra money just to play the same games.

KILLER CATALOGUE NOT KILLER APP

Harrison banks on lots of games not big games

During a recent tête-à-tête with Sony semi-official blog Three Speech, worldwide studios boss Phil Harrison addressed the issue of exclusives by asserting that Playstation 3 would not and could not rely on a few big name games to make the system a success. He asserts that as early as the PSone "a lot of people talked about the having the 'killer app' when actually it's the killer catalogue you want. It's not about having a single title like a *Mario* or a *Sonic* that you rest an entire platform personality on, it's about having a wide catalogue that satisfies a number of different consumer tastes and styles."

When it comes to satisfying a range of different needs, the PS3 certainly tries its hardest with Blu-ray, web access and huge amount of multimedia functionality out of the box. Nevertheless, no matter what Mr Harrison says, big name games do drive hardware sales - the Xbox 360 has coasted for a year now on the promise of what *Gears Of War* and *Halo 3* can offer and while Sony's Japanese and US launch didn't bring the big hitters, some might have hoped for the good news is that the PS3 release list is packed full of star quality: *Metal Gear Solid, Devil May Cry, Gran Turismo, Heavenly Sword*... killer catalogue indeed.

WORD FROM THE FORUM

The Next3 community speaks

Cameron I don't think it really matters. *GTA* plays better on the Playstation, so even if it's released on both consoles our version will be better. As along as it stays on PS3, I'm fine with it.

Alanspike I think it comes down to money. If Microsoft offer an equal or better deal then the development teams are not likely to refuse. Plus I think Microsoft plans to dethrone the Playstation 3 by taking all the exclusives. Boo hoo Bill Gates, looks like you're not getting your grubby mitts on *Metal Gear Solid 4*.

Monkeynut This is hopefully a temporary thing - once developers start to develop on the PS3 as the lead platform (and why whouldn't they, it's clearly the more powerful console) more and more games will become exclusives, simply by default. Besides, Microsoft could never have the 'exclusivity' of being PlayStation - the coolest gaming brand ever.

New topic | Post Reply

TwitchGaming

Thoughts, imaginings and opinion from Next3s resident columnist, Twitch

It's All Over

...well, kind of

IT'S a tough job having to play the PS3 months before its debut here in the UK. Sure, you don't believe that one bit. In fact, you'd give your right nut to be in the same position as me; playing the games you can't possibly wait three more months for. I'm a god in your world – I have access to the thing you crave most. I have the power to hold it in my hands, to wipe my sticky fingers all over it and use my own shirt to clean the thing. Life for me is pretty damn good... or not.

I've sat here for the past few months cooing over Sony's next-gen wonder. I've played all the code we have dozens of times and love most of it immensely – but I've had to do so with a certain level of restraint. When I say restraint I mean in the same way Hannibal Lector is restrained in *Silence Of The Lambs*. Restraint at that constant barrage of insults and lies that have emerged online over the months prior to the PS3's launch in North America and Japan.

It is something that I have spoken about before: my fight against the idiots. I felt a lot like Dan Ashcroft did in the wonderful *Nathan Barley*, at war with a subculture that existed purely to oppose the status quo by acting as stupid as possible ('status quo' being a hypothetical description of the PS3 for any said idiots reading this). But from my perch high above such lunacy, I had the benefit of knowing there was one thing these people – with their constant criticisms and console backlash– had in common: they were all wrong about the PS3.

Now imagine how hard it's been for me having to wade through all the heinous crap that accumulated on a daily basis. To just sit here gritting my teeth through the majority of it. There were many times where I was so enraged by the clearly anti-Sony nature of certain news reports that I felt tempted to hit the comments thread and leave a piece of my own opinion. This sort of one-sided news reporting is of course a problem for a number of reasons – namely that it substitutes genuine news for one person's opinion.

It's my job to stay commercially aware and part of that involves hitting various websites and other news sources to keep abreast of the latest industry developments. So imagine how annoyed I've been with the amount of flak the PS3 was receiving – from people who never actually played it prior to its release. I got so frustrated by writers dressing-up their own vitriolic opinions as news pieces. Obviously, I'm not going to name any of the websites because I'm sure Pro-G and Kotaku wouldn't appreciate that – but you can now understand the plight I've been through.

Yeah – it's been lovely having several PS3s in the office. It's been wonderful getting to play the games Europe was so cruelly denied for several months. But it's been an uphill challenge avoiding and ignoring web idiots in the process. It's the price I've had to pay.

But hopefully that's going to change. The Playstation 3 has already hit two out of the three big territories, meaning the aforementioned idiots are hopefully eating humble pie right now – as well as the leftovers from a good Christmas and New Year scoff. But that still leaves the UK to continue the idiocy – which is a bloody scary thought. As much as I pray that the majority of prospective UK PS3 fans made a New Year's resolution not to become cynical, I fear it may be in vain. We've been dealt the biggest blow by the console delay. To make matters worse, we're now the only ones left without a Playstation 3.

So it falls on me, the god of your world, to inform you that the PS3 will be more than worth the wait. Sure, I've had access to one of three Playstation 3s in the time you lot have been recovering from the delay. I've played games months ago that you won't get so much as a sniff of until March. But that doesn't mean I'm a jerk. It means my opinion has more gravitas than those people who reported, day after day, about things they possibly couldn't know, having not had access to their own unit.

In closing, allow me to impart some wisdom. The Playstation 3 is not the disappointment many pinned it as. It won't come last in the next-gen console race and it isn't a giant misstep for Sony. As America and Japan are now clearly aware, the PS3 is wonderful. Happy New Year, readers.

Twitch

twitch@imagine-publishing.co.uk

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PLAYSTATION 3

Networking not working?

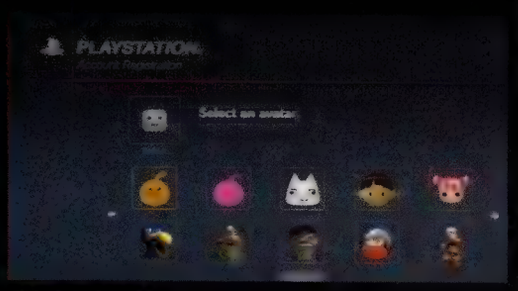
Next-gen isn't just about polygon counts, processor speeds and tilt control – it's about networking. In theory, connecting your console up to one all-powerful network opens up a realm of possibilities – but will Playstation 3 make the most of these possibilities? Only time will tell. Until then, here's a neat rundown of all that your PS3 can do online right here, right now. Oh, and a look into the future of online gaming too.

OH, what a lovely next-gen war! It's a war that's being fought on several fronts. Firstly: games. Format-exclusive titles always have been on the frontline; if anything shifts hardware then it's the promise of being able to play the latest triple-A game and only on a certain piece of kit. Next: hardware spec. Who has the best, most powerful, most function-laden hardware at a cost-effective price? And lastly: online gaming and everything else that surrounds it. The first two have been around since the dawn of console wars, but online gaming, certainly in terms of console gaming, is a relatively new phenomenon.

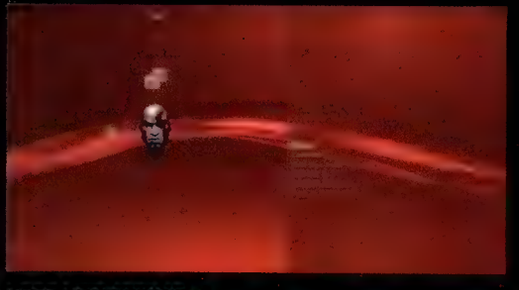
The reason why the online aspect is so important is that it brings the first two

HOW TO...
Set up your Network account

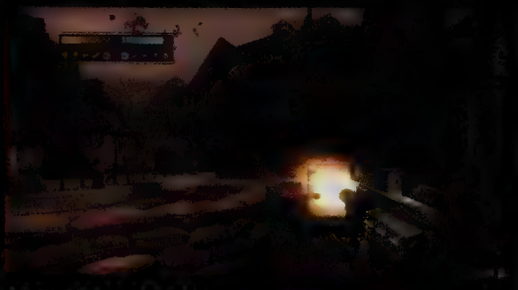
NETWORK SIGN UP »
Once you've created a profile on your PS3 you can sign up for the Network.



REGISTRATION »
Just run through Sony's registration process, choose an Online ID and an avatar and you're away.



USER NETWORK ID »
When you have an ID you can do a number of things. Send friend requests and text messages, including picture attachments.



RESISTANCE ONLINE »
Oh, and you can also play games online like *Resistance*, above. Already, this is much better than the PS2's Net Play.

PLAYSTATION NETWORK VERSUS XBOX LIVE

It's where a major next-gen battle will take place: online gaming. But has Sony learned from its mistakes with PS2's Net Play? How does PS3 online compare with its main rival? All is revealed in this easy-to-read boxout...

	PLAYSTATION NETWORK	XBOX LIVE GOLD	XBOX LIVE SILVER
ONLINE GAMING	YES	YES	NO
SINGLE GAMER ID	YES	YES	YES
FRIENDS LIST	YES	YES	YES
BROWSE FRIEND'S PLAYED GAMES	NO	YES	YES
ACCESS TO ONLINE STORE (GAMES, EXTRA CONTENT, TRAILERS & DEMOS)	YES	YES	YES*
GAME INVITATION	YES	YES	NO
AVATAR	YES	YES	YES
GAMER REPUTATION	NO	YES	NO
VOICE CHAT	TBC	YES	YES
VIDEO CHAT	TBC	YES	NO
TEXT MESSAGING	YES	YES	YES
% OF GAMES ONLINE GAMING COMPATIBLE†	75%	48%	NA%
PRICE	FREE	£4.99/MONTH	FREE

*Demos available up to two weeks after Gold release
† PS3 sample of 11 games, Xbox 360 sample 145 games

SUMMARY

Playstation Network lacks a few of Live's minor features (you won't miss Gamer Rep and or the ability to browse a friend's games played); however, its major selling point is that it's completely free of charge. This means, at £4.99 per month, you'll be saving £59.88 a year over Xbox Live.

Ridge Racer 7 boasts an easy-to-use text chat interface which enables you to talk with players from Japan.

Its online game is also well-tuned (pun intended) with plenty of fresh ideas.

points together. The hardware; how well your console interacts with the network; the software, in terms of the online gaming service; and the exclusive content, both gaming and, in this broadband age, software that had previously driven sales of VCRs, cassette tapes and CDs: music and movies.

Online is also important because it offers two more opportunities: creative and commercial. Creative for developers in how they use networking to make new and better types of games, commercial in that, just like the internet, it affords a route into people's homes where things can be bought and sold.

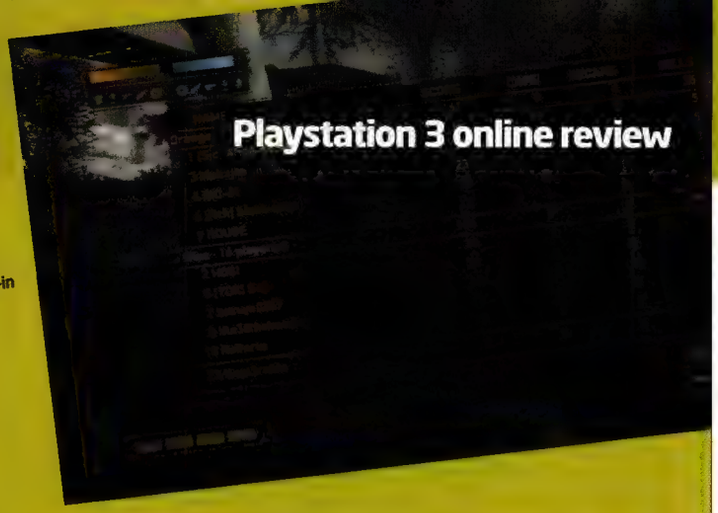
The last round of consoles could be viewed as a dry run for networked gaming; none of the three formats got it completely right first time round. Xbox Live, while clearly the best service, lacked the kind of installed user base that PlayStation 2 could muster. Net Play was plagued with problems such as no single gamer ID, hardware that had to be bolted on to the PS2 and an unclear online strategy. Nintendo didn't even really show up to the party. GameCube, to our knowledge, had only a couple of games that could be played online and it never really went in wholeheartedly with the idea of playing games against people over a network. Strange really, for a company that prides itself on its innovation and dedication to fun gaming.

Whatever, this time round sees all three companies with clear and improved online strategies: Xbox Live and Playstation Network going head-to-head with traditional online gaming backed up with content download, Nintendo relying on its fanbase for Virtual Console downloading of its old games.

Straight out of the box you can see that PS3 is designed for network use. Both models have Ethernet built in, but if you've got a 60GB model (and a wireless router) then you can connect via the PS3's built-in Wi-Fi. It's also a lot easier to use too, just a simple matter of plugging anything in that needs to be plugged in, switching on the PS3 and, well, it all works. Compared to getting the PS2 online, this is child's play.

Supposedly the Cell chip (the processor at the heart of the PS3) has been designed with network gaming in mind, so much so, that this version of the Cell chip has been dubbed Cell Broadband. We take this to mean that it can do lots of things at once and efficiently: stream network data and process game information at the same time.

And, thanks to Microsoft pointing the way, there have been some major improvements to Playstation Network. You now have a single game identity. Along with being able to track players across all titles in online leader boards and so on, this enables you to have a Friends list, making it easy to contact your friends and arrange some playtime with them. You also get messaging now too – at the moment it's just text messaging with image attachments

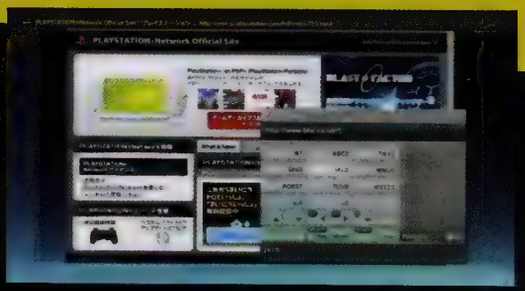


Playstation 3 online review

Resistance features plenty of great online options including built-in clan support.

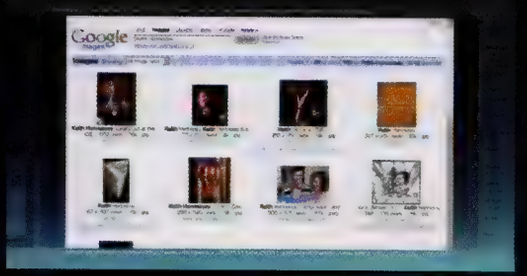
PLAYSTATION 3 AND THE INTERNET

Playstation 3 is the only console that boasts complete internet browser support – that means you can surf the net on your TV. But how far does it go and what are the advantages to this?



ADDRESS ENTRY »»
Press start to bring up the Address entry dialogue. It uses a mobile phone-style predictive text entry or you can also plug in a keyboard for easier entry.

BROWSER WINDOWS »»
Click the R3 button to select an open window or tap the R2 & L2 buttons to flip between screens. We didn't manage to work out how many windows the PS3 can display at once, just know this: it's a lot.



INTERNET ACCESS»»
Just like a PC you can view and download pictures from the internet. Here we search for pictures of our very own Keith Hennessey.

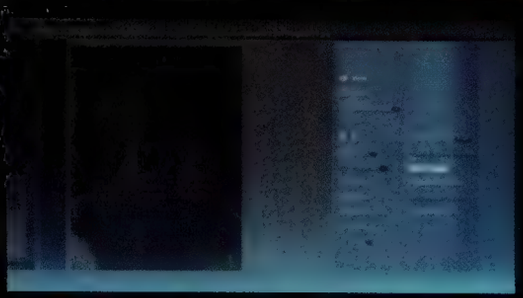
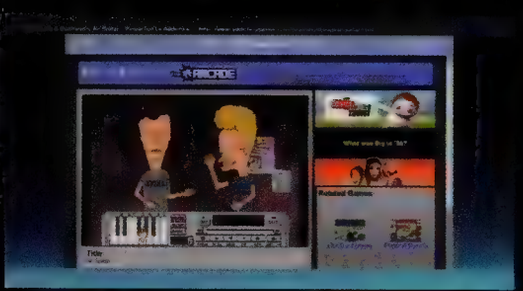
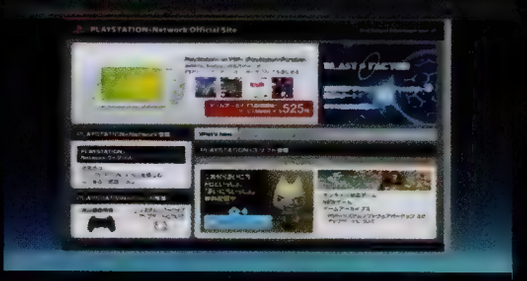


IMAGE DOWNLOAD »»
Like the PSP's browser you download images by putting the pointer over the image then hitting ⓐ and selecting Save Image from the File menu. These are then stored on the HDD and can be viewed like any other image.

MP3 DOWNLOAD »»
Likewise, MP3s can also be downloaded to the HDD.



FLASH GAMES »»
The Browser does support Macromedia Flash, so all manner of Flash content is available to view or play. However, PS3 doesn't have Flash 8, so we need an update there please.



SHOPPING »»
The PS3 Browser is as secure as any PC or Mac browser, making online purchases no different.

(no email support), but to come is free voice and video chat just like you can enjoy on a PC.

Perhaps the biggest improvement, or rather development, of all is on-demand content. This is something we've been promised for years – the ability to download and play just about any digital media to our hard drives. For a price, of course. The Playstation Store is Sony's online shop where, for the moment, you can download game demos, HD game trailers and HD movie trailers. In the future, however, this is where you'll be able to get extra content for you titles, buy MP3s and even download full games. Already in Japan you can download full PSone games (Sony is releasing ten games per month for download) but before you know it, other companies will be joining in (Sega has been heavily rumoured to be joining soon) and it's only a matter of time before PS2 games and full HD movies become available to buy online. And then? Well, with a big enough broadband pipe you could, in theory, be buying and downloading full PS3 games over the internet without ever even going to a shop.

One game that points the way is *Gran Turismo HD Concept*. Originally slated for a retail release, the game is now only going to be available as a free download; it was released on Christmas Eve in Japan. The download includes two tracks, 30 cars and online gaming support – extra stuff (cars and tracks) will be available to download in

the future, with cars expected to cost around 50p. If this model is successful (and with a game like *Gran Turismo*, it has got every chance) then expect it to become more popular in the future.

It's not just about downloading either; it's also about what you can upload. Ever seen any online karaoke? Well, the new *SingStar* enables you do exactly that – post your best (or worst) performances onto the server where other people can view and rate them.

The other clever thing about PS3 online is that it's an open platform. With Xbox Live you can only ever access the content that is provided by Microsoft through its Marketplace, but because the PS3 has complete internet access through its Browser, the opportunities for third parties to provide content are there, just like a PC. The difference is that the PS3, and all this content, will be played through a TV, not a pokey little monitor, so expect websites that cater specifically for Playstation 3 users before long.

The other thing about on-demand content is what you do with it once you've downloaded it. Obviously you're going to use it through your Playstation 3 but if you have a PSP (and a 60GB model PS3) too then that networking goes to the next level. The PS3 has LocationFree technology built in to it. LocationFree, in case you don't know, is Sony's home-networking technology that enables you to remotely view any digital content you have on your PC. So that means (in the case of PS3) viewing movies (including Blu-rays) and listening to music streamed to your PSP.

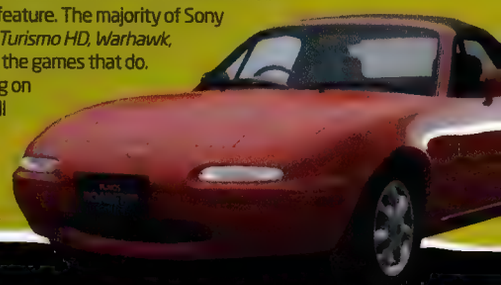
So what do we make of the new Playstation Network? Well, it's clear that Sony has learnt from its mistakes, and from the success of others, and put together an excellent online gaming service. There's potential there too – a potential for an integrated online content and gaming experience, one that fulfils the promise of the medium. But has it done enough to win the online next-gen battle? Time will tell but with Network on offer, Sony has given the PS3 a fighting chance.

WHAT'S IN STORE?

Movies, music and PSone games heading your way soon

The current Playstation Store has just a small sample of what will be available in the next few months. Obviously more demos and videos will be posted as they become available, but this just the beginning. Already in Japan you can download full PSone games - there are nine available at the moment (including *Resident Evil: Director's Cut, Jumping Flash, Hot Shots Golf 2, Silent Bomber, Tekken 2* and *Mr Driller*) and Sony plans to release ten games per month. These are expected to cost between £5 and £10 when they become available in the UK. Once purchased, the games can also be transferred to your PSP's memory stick and played through its PSone emulator (which is free to download).

The other big thing yet to be added to the Store are game extras. New levels, tracks, cars and even episodic content will be available for all games that support this feature. The majority of Sony games will do, with *Gran Turismo HD, Warhawk,* and *Resistance* amongst the games that do. Prices will vary depending on content, but at least you'll be charged in pounds and pence, unlike Microsoft's points-for-money system.



NEXT3: NETWORK NOOB

Putting the first batch of PS3 online games to the proverbial sword

RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN

NUMBER OF PLAYERS: 2-40
ONLINE GAME MODES: Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch, Meltdown, Breach, CTF, Conversion
NUMBER OF MAPS: 11
RELEASE DATE: Out now

Resistance boasts 40 players online at once does not only make it the biggest online console game of all time, but (for an FPS) also one of its best. The huge number of players enables (no surprise here) huge land battles that are best played in one of the game's excellent team-based modes. Amazingly this makes no difference to the speed of the game, even when on a relatively slow connection - this is largely thanks to some clever programming from the developer. This is a great showcase for the new Playstation Network.

RIDGE RACER 7

NUMBER OF PLAYERS: 2-14
ONLINE GAME MODES: Standard Race, Team Battle, Pair Battle, Pair Time Attack
NUMBER OF TRACKS: 44
RELEASE DATE: Out now

Racing against human opponents adds a whole new dimension to the game and is arguably the way it was meant to be played; down the arcades with rows of arcade cabinets linked up.

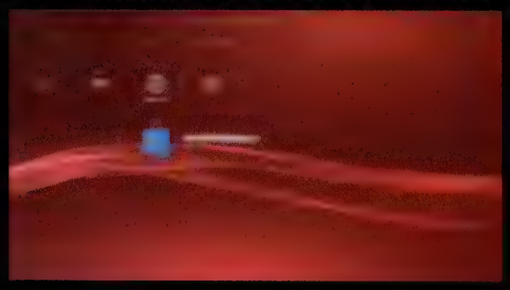
Here though up to 14 racers at once can lead to some pretty-frenetic racing and, this being a real hardcore gamers' game, one mistake can lead to a lonely trudge home in last place while everyone else battles it out.

Some great game ranking ideas and chat room function makes this a friendly, easy-to-enjoy online experience.

PLAYSTATION STORE

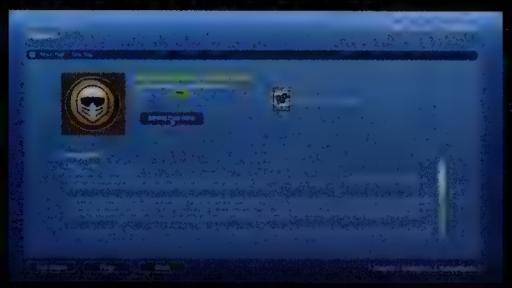
A major part of PS3 online is Sony's new online store. It offers everything from demos to movie trailers and promises to evolve in the near future to include content such as full HD movies and PlayStation games. Here's a brief rundown of what's available right now.

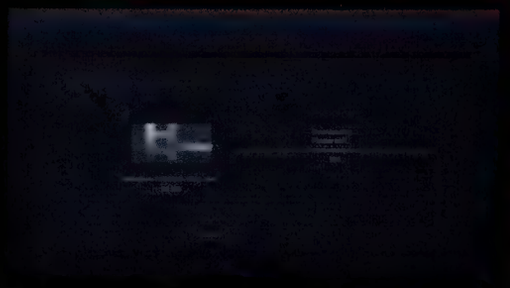
PLAYSTATIONSTORE XMB »
The Store is accessed through the XMB in the Network section.



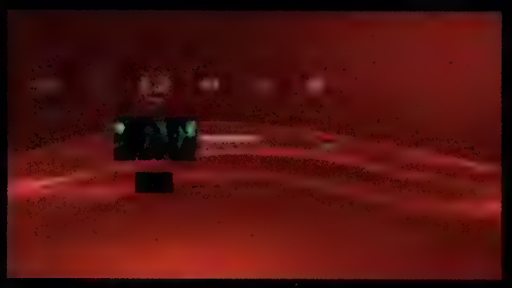
PLAYSTATIONSTORE HOMEPAGE »
The Playstation Store homepage bears more than a passing resemblance to Apple's iTunes Music Store and, as such, is easy to navigate. From here you can choose from Featured Items, Demos, Downloadable Games or View All, which includes HD (720p & 1080p) movie and game trailers.

DEMO DOWNLOAD »
Clicking on an icon takes you through to the download page. Here you'll be quoted a price (in this case the demo's free) and given a description of what you're downloading.





DOWNLOADING TRAILER »
Click that download button and choose where to save the file (usually the HDD) and you'll get this screen. Unfortunately, you can't back up out of this screen while you're downloading without cancelling the download. Major fault. However, anything you buy can be placed in your cart and then downloaded all at once.



MOVIE DOWNLOADS »
Movie downloads appear under the Video icon in the XMB. Demos under the Game icon, complete with background graphic, just like the PSP. Any movie downloads can be set to play 15 seconds of the movie as the icon.

VIDEO VIEW »
The video player has the same functionality for Blu-ray movies and any imported home movies. The PS3 can play several HD formats such as MPEG-4 and AAC. However, it cannot view any movies that require QuickTime to be installed on your computer nor can Windows Media Player or RealPlayer movies be viewed, either. Hopefully, this will be remedied in the future.

CALL OF DUTY 3

NUMBER OF PLAYERS: 2-24
ONLINE GAME MODES: War, CTF, Headquarters, Team Battle, Battle
NUMBER OF MAPS: 9
RELEASE DATE: Out now

The tried and trusted *Call Of Duty* online game gets the addition of character classes to add a new strategic depth to the proceedings this year. Characters such as Medics, Heavy Machine Gunners and Engineers each have their own special abilities, which goes a long way to promote team play.

You can play straight deathmatch type games too, but then that wouldn't do this excellent, now tactical, online game any justice.

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2007

NUMBER OF PLAYERS: 2-4
ONLINE GAME MODES: Stroke Play, Match Play, Mini-games, Fourball, Skins, Best Ball, Alternate Shot, Battle One Ball
NUMBER OF COURSES: 12
RELEASE DATE: Out now

It's pretty hard to do online golf wrong, especially when its got Tiger Woods' name emblazoned on the box. There are a huge variety of games to play, from all the traditional types like Skins and Fourball and a load of EA's own mini-games for those of you less serious about your golf.

The only problem? We couldn't find many people to play. Maybe it's just the kind of online game you play on a lazy Sunday afternoon.

This is just a snapshot of PS3 online gaming - full reviews next month

PS3 Publisher// EA Developer// EALA Genre//FPS Players//12-15 Players
Website//www.ea.com/mob/airborne/index.jsp Release Date//Q2 2007

In air, on land

Medal Of Honor Airborne

WHEN trying to understand just why it is that developers keep reverting back to World War II – years after some would argue it's already run its course – it's important to analyse it in as simple and black-and-white a fashion as possible. That means thinking of events as good versus bad, Allies versus Axies. No shades of grey. In this sense you can't get a more clear-cut bad guy than the Nazi in a FPS. Of course, we also have the benefit of knowing the outcome to WWII, which therefore presents the perfect canvas for developers to work with. Our role in these games is to ensure we reach that outcome while facing opposition that – in the context of the game – can very clearly be called an enemy.

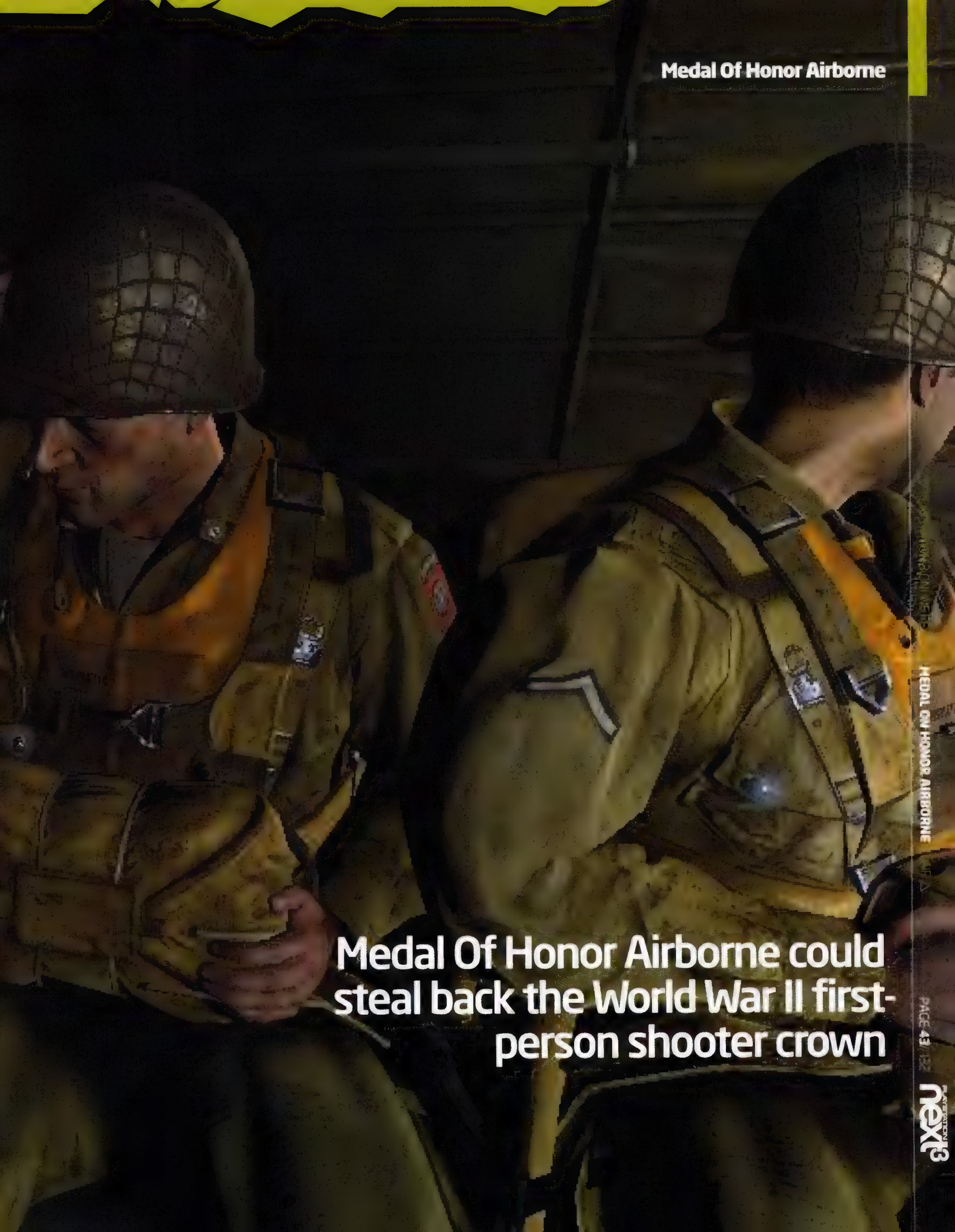
Developers don't have to concern themselves with such things as envisioning new worlds with vast, richly detailed stories and deep characters. World War II already did it for them; despite some games still choosing not to bother with a plot or character development. Developers have been given a pretext and are free to do whatever they want within the boundaries of that... but that's where the problem lies. We're at the stage now, irrespective of next-gen consoles and the power they yield, where we need developers to take that pretext and create something else. Something new. Something ironically much like *Medal Of Honor Airborne*.

Of course we say ironically because this is Electronic Arts we're dealing with here. As we're sure you're aware, EA has maintained a less-than-reputable reputation from many gamers, thanks to its knack for releasing yearly updates to some of its initially best and most promising titles – bringing a general decline in quality with every subsequent release. You could level such a criticism at the *Medal Of Honor* series, but to do so would deny the very interesting directions EA has taken the franchise. Where the original PSone games focussed more on style and immersion, the PS2 successors opted for an epic scale that worked best to the console's power, as well as an orchestral score and intense cinematic presentation.

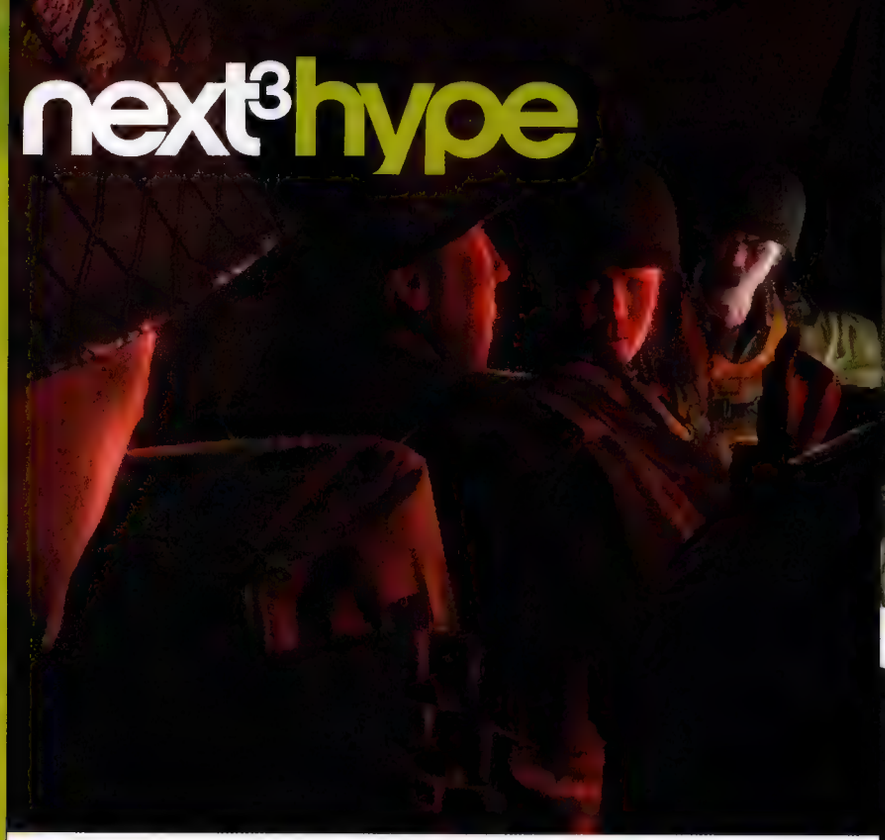
European Assault, the last of EA's previous-gen canon, was reviled more than it was revered – but its arcade style, with vibrant colours in favour of the gritty previous entries, level bosses, squad commands and a story by John '*Conan The Barbarian*' Milius, made it more than worthy of a look. It was a last-ditch attempt to put some new ideas back into the already-waning franchise, whose thunder was being stolen by Activision's *Call Of Duty* and Ubisoft's *Brothers In Arms* franchises. For its first foray into next-generation territory, EA is once again trying to mix things up. In fact, *Airborne* is bringing enough new ideas and genuine innovations that it could steal back that WWII FPS shooter crown.

Players take the role of two different soldiers, Private Tavers and Pathfinder Eddie La Pointe and follow their journey to Berlin – an event that ultimately ended the European campaign. Both have different objectives to fulfil over the course of the five operations (see the Greased Monkey's boxout for more) and as the name suggests, *Airborne* is all about leaping from the accurately modelled C-47 Dakota planes into huge battlefields – choosing your time to jump and directing the descent too.

Playing as a pathfinder you can expect to exit the plane first, hitting the ground and seamlessly entering La Pointe's different style of gameplay, designating drop zones with radio beacons. La Pointe's sections will bring a certain level of stealth that *Medal Of Honor Underground* fans may well appreciate. As Tavers you can expect things to operate on a more traditional



Medal Of Honor Airborne could steal back the World War II first-person shooter crown



Both enemy and friendly AI has been notched up a level this time.

CONTINUATION //

first-person shooter level. But what this essentially means for both men is that you'll jump into the battlefield twice. Doing so as Tavers, with hundreds of allies jumping and descending around you, is where the game is at its most visceral. As stunning to behold as these sections are, readers worried about whether they will be shot down before hitting the ground need not. It would be too easy for EA to let enemy fire rip you apart – and thus annoying for the player. As such, the action really begins when you're several-dozen feet from the ground.

You can land three different ways in the game. The first is what many people may find themselves experiencing in those initial stages: the botched version. Here, your parachute can hit trees and other such obstructions and become tangled – forcing you to dangle there helplessly, cutting the ropes. The second is the intermediate: smooth and it should have you up on your feet in no time if carried out successfully. The third will become the most popular and it's known as the 'greased landing'. It sees you gauging the perfect distance from air to ground, cutting your ropes at the right time and hitting the ground running. The idea of leaping out of the plane into each operation isn't the only intuitive design in *Airborne*. It's all about player choice.

From the second you jump out of the plane you are in control of everything. It's up to you to reach ground safety, and that includes deciding a drop point, working the angle of your approach, ground tactics and in which order you wish to accomplish various tasks. You're also free to land anywhere you wish within the designated battle area – on the rooftops (or crashing through them), in fields around the outskirts of towns, deep in the middle of enemy territory, on sniper towers and more.

These battle areas are miles long and wide, though you won't be able to cover the entire area; there will still be boundaries such as broken furniture, rubble and impenetrable foliage preventing you from escaping the outskirts. From the air you will be able to see most objectives you're going to have to address. But the extent to which you reach them depends entirely on your exit point from the plane and the altitude of the jump itself. With the ability to jump and land anywhere in the battlefield, with progression and decision left entirely in your hands, *Airborne* cannot be linear.

It's a good thing it isn't – at least not in the on-the-rails sense the previous games have been. But that doesn't mean it's entirely open-ended either. Given the size of the battle areas, leaving them with complete autonomy would make *Airborne* feel a tad aimless. You need designs that keep you focused on something, even in the realm of an open-ended environment. Instead the game enables you to complete objectives in any order you wish – as well as enter specific combat areas with several possible entrances or exits, fighting through the opposition that way. You should also expect the enemies in *Airborne* to exude a little bit more intelligence than in previous games thanks to the new affordance AI the team at EALA has created.

Affordance AI relates to anything in the combat zone that affects a soldier or enemy's battle advantage over the opposing side. That means as soon as you enter a combat area and alert the enemy to your presence, they will select the best cover available to them at that moment; running towards higher ground if they have time, hiding behind crates or other vehicles and so on. It's unique to *Airborne* and WWII first-person shooters because it means enemies react in mostly natural ways, rather than relying on scripted events to define their reactions. This also means most fire fights will

"Everything appears to be in place for one hell of a first-person shooter"

Can you imagine having to jump through that? Well, you just might have to.

Touring the Battlefields

Airborne is set through five extremely crucial WWII operations. Here we detail each of those daring operations, if only to remind you why it's important to pay attention in history lessons

1 Operation Husky *July 10, 1943, Italy*

The Allied invasion of Sicily began 9 July 1943 and raged for over a month, coming to a close on 17 August. Husky was a truly major amphibious and airborne assault that involved British, Canadian and US forces fighting Italian and German soldiers. Four airborne jumps were carried out that night, two American and two British. It was also the 82nd Airborne division's first combat parachute jump. Suffice it to say it was an Allied victory. Though it was unplanned, the success of Operation Husky opened the doors for the Allied invasion of Italy.

2 Operation Avalanche *September 13, 1943, Italy*

The Italians withdrew from the war a day prior to invasion. The landings at the port of Salerno were carried out with no naval or aerial bombardment. This was to give the US Fifth Army - consisting of US VI Corps, British X Corps and the 82nd Airborne division - the element of surprise. Unfortunately the enemy was made aware of the landings and a loudspeaker suddenly declared, "Come on in and give up! We have you covered!" We attacked anyway. Avalanche was devised under the faux-title of *Top Hat* and was an operation fraught with heavy casualties.

3 Operation Neptune *June 6, 1944, France*

The Allied invasion of Normandy, also known as Operation Overload, took place on Gold Beach, Juno Beach, Omaha Beach, Point du Hoc, Sword Beach and Utah Beach. It began on 6 June 1944 and came to a close almost a month later on 30 June. The airborne landings were supposed to secure the flanks of the assault area, featuring the 82nd and 101t Airborne Divisions. The 82nd captured the town of Saint-Mere-Eglise on the morning of 6 June, making the claim that it was the first town liberated by the invasion.

4 Operation Market Garden *September 17, 1944, Holland*

By using a large-scale airborne and rapidly advancing armoured units along connected roads, the objective was to capture a series of bridges over the main rivers of the German-occupied Netherlands. This would enable the Allies to cross the Rhine River - the last major barrier to an advance into Germany itself. Though the early stages were a success, the bridge at Arnhem wasn't taken - resulting in the slaughter of the 1st British Airborne. The Rhine was finally taken in 1945 as part of the Allied Offensive's advance.

5 Operation Varsity *March 24, 1945, Germany*

This was the single largest airborne drop in history and it's something referenced even today at West Point - New York's prestigious United States Military Academy - as *the* greatest example of an airborne operation. Varsity took place towards the end of World War II, on 24 March1945. The historic event saw the participation of 1,700 transport aircraft and two divisions. It also welcomed the first use of the C-46 Commando transport aircraft - which operated with the C-47 Skytrain used in previous operations.

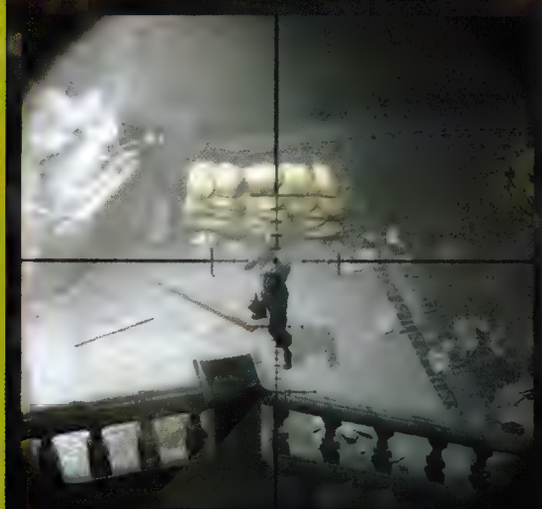
Art direction looks stunning in *Airborne*.

Greased Monkeys

Becoming Airborne

After the outbreak of World War II, the 82nd Division was called back into active service. The 82nd Infantry Division became known as the 82nd Airborne Division - the first of its kind in the United States Army. Parachute and glider assaults were the Division's first two combat operations at the invasion of Sicily.

The first assault on Sicily by the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment was the United States Army's first ever regimental sized combat parachute assault - which is also the starting point of *Medal Of Honor Airborne*. As the last country to devise an airborne force, early operations were fraught with huge mistakes and accidents. Nevertheless, the 82nd Airborne Division helped begin a lineage that survives and inspires even today.



Afford it

Them Nazi's is smarter now

Unlike previous *Medal Of Honor* games the artificial intelligence in *Airborne* will be much more robust than we've seen before. It's going to offer its soldiers, friendly and enemy alike, a surprising amount of autonomy. EA has branded it 'Affordance AI' and it relates to anything in the combat area that enables friends and enemies to gain a better combat advantage. That includes hiding behind the best cover available, gaining higher ground or slipping behind crates and other such things. It's unique in because it means enemies react in mostly natural ways, rather than relying on scripted events of old.

Does this screenshot look familiar? EA has its work cut out to make *Airborne* different.

present different results. It reacts based on proximity – which means if you come around a corner, jump down through the roof or assault a particular enemy head-on, from the three different directions, they will seek cover differently each time.

Tavers and La Pointe both have a proficiency rating with the weapons you use. So if you prefer a rifle over a machine gun, or vice versa, the game will constantly remember this – improving your accuracy and general use over time. A high proficiency rating means you can customise weapons. There were genuine reports that detailed Allied soldiers doing a lot of weapon customisations and modification – filing down firing pins for improved rates of fire, compensators and special grips to support aiming, slings and pads that added to weapon stability and accuracy and even duct tape for extra cartridges (soldiers would stick two together to enable faster reloads and more effective close quarters combat). You can do these things in *Airborne*. It also lets you customise certain sections of your body too. You can add additional ammo storage, shoulder and leg holsters, weapon slings and so on – letting carry more of everything. Whether the game has an initial weapon carry limit that grows over time remains to be seen, but it wouldn't surprise us if it did.

Speaking of weapons, EALA has included what it refers to as the 'true trigger' mechanism. This essentially finds you gently squeezing the trigger of some weapons rather than hastily pulling them. The intuitive thing here is that you use the analogue sticks to gauge some shots – much like you would an actual rifle. This makes the process of aiming down your sight and shooting someone much more immersive. Furthermore, slightly squeezing the trigger will help stabilise the weapon much like it would – in other games of this ilk – when holding your breath while using a sniper rifle or machine gun.

EA has divided teams to work on *Medal Of Honor Airborne*. As we're sure you're aware, it is also going to be released on PS2 and Xbox. That may scare some readers with thoughts of *Call Of Duty 3* – despite being a great shooter – turning out as nothing more than an previous-gen shooter tarted up to look like a next-gen game (be sure to read this issue's review for more information on that). But unlike Activision's latest, Electronic Arts has put a specific team in charge of each version to ensure it meets the demands of the tools at their disposal.

Every version of the game will follow the same story arc of the 82nd Airborne division. It's a move that resembles what Ubisoft did recently with the different versions of *Splinter Cell: Double Agent* – which is one that ultimately paid off too, as the PS2 and 360 versions were surprisingly different, warranting a look regardless of whether you've played the other version or not. We're sure this is no different of the PS3 *Airborne* and its previous-gen versions.

It's clear to see, everything appears to be in place for one hell of a first-person shooter. So do we have any reservations? Well, of course we do. As much as we want EA to succeed in bringing *Medal Of Honor* on to next-gen platforms, we can't help but feel that despite its innovations, it's still dealing with things we've seen in games before – Operation Market Garden being one example, hundreds of Nazi's and a cinematic flair another.

"With the ability to land anywhere in the battlefield, progression is left in your hands"

Medal Of Honor Airborne certainly has enough interesting and intuitive ideas to warrant anyone's attention – as well as innovative AI and a new design... but will it be enough to win over the jaded crowd that wants more from its next-generation shooters than retreads of previously established material? Are we really at that stage where enough is enough? In essence, are we tired of Nazi shooting galleries? Like the very war that inspired it... only time will tell.

PS3 // Publisher Sony // Developer Factor 5 // Genre Third-person shooter // Players 1 // Website TBA // Release Date TBA

Lair

Here be dragons

AWESOME creatures dragons. From hoarding gold to breathing fire and looking like it should be physically impossible for them to fly, the dragon has inspired many a story, film, videogame, whatever. Mostly they are shown to be noble creatures, some can even talk, but even with all their nobility and musical talents they are creatures of sheer power. And swooping on to PS3s next year is *Lair*, the new dragon-'em-up from Factor 5, the development team behind the *Turrican* series back in the Nineties and the *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron* games on the Nintendo GameCube. Factor 5 is now focusing on the PS3 and its first game concentrates on the new Sixaxis controller and dragons.

Lair sees you as a dragon jockey, or maybe dragon knight would be a better turn of phrase. Dragon rider? Dragoner, that sounds pretty cool. Okay, *Lair* sees you as a Dragoner saddled to the back of a huge fire-breathing, bone-crunching dragon and it's up to you to... well we don't know yet. There haven't been any details about the plot as yet, but from what we can gather from the preview code is that there are two armies, yours and theirs, and, well, one of them has to fall. Preferably theirs, otherwise it'll be a pretty short game. The plot and story and all that is probably being left to the end since *Lair* relies heavily on the tilt functions of the Sixaxis controller and it's incredibly important to get it right. So far it's going pretty well, though we do have a few problems with it, or maybe we're just not embracing it because we're still getting used to it and it feels weird.

The preview we've been playing that you won't even get a sniff of until March next year (how does that make you feel? Knowing that we're playing all this now and you're not? It makes us feel pretty special), starts with a brief tutorial on how to control the dragon. It should be as easy as flying through a few hoops, since that's exactly what you have to do, just glide through some hoops that are floating in the sky. The dragon flies like an aeroplane, you point the Sixaxis down and the dragon goes down, which doesn't help when the hoops are up, so pointing the controller upwards lets the dragon gain height and sail through the target. Simple really, but then the next hoop is set about 45 degrees to the right of the one we'd just gone through. Of course tilting the controller to the right will send the dragon in the correct direction, but it takes a few tries to gauge how much you have to tilt it. It's not a whole lot, flinging the controller on its side causes the dragon to veer wildly off course and sees you twisting the pad this way and that to try to get back on track. Initially the lack of resistance is confusing, surely we should feel something when the pad

Lair relies heavily on the tilt functions of the Sixaxis controller

Dragon killer

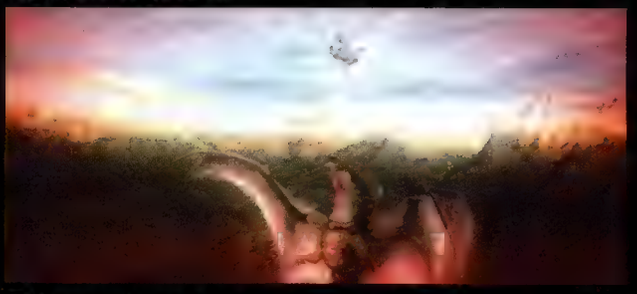
It's not all about breathing fire

1 Up close When you get close to another dragon you can attack it by using the Sixaxis to sharply bash into it from the side.

2 Personal Do it a few times and you'll get the opportunity to mount the enemy dragon and dish out some punishment to its rider.

3 Red-eye When the edges of the screen go red, that's your cue to hit one of the face buttons to attack.

4 Smack down It only takes a few hits to win this mini-battle, sending the dragon plummeting to earth...



5 Yummy! ...while the rider becomes a tasty, healthy, replenishing snack for your giant dragon.

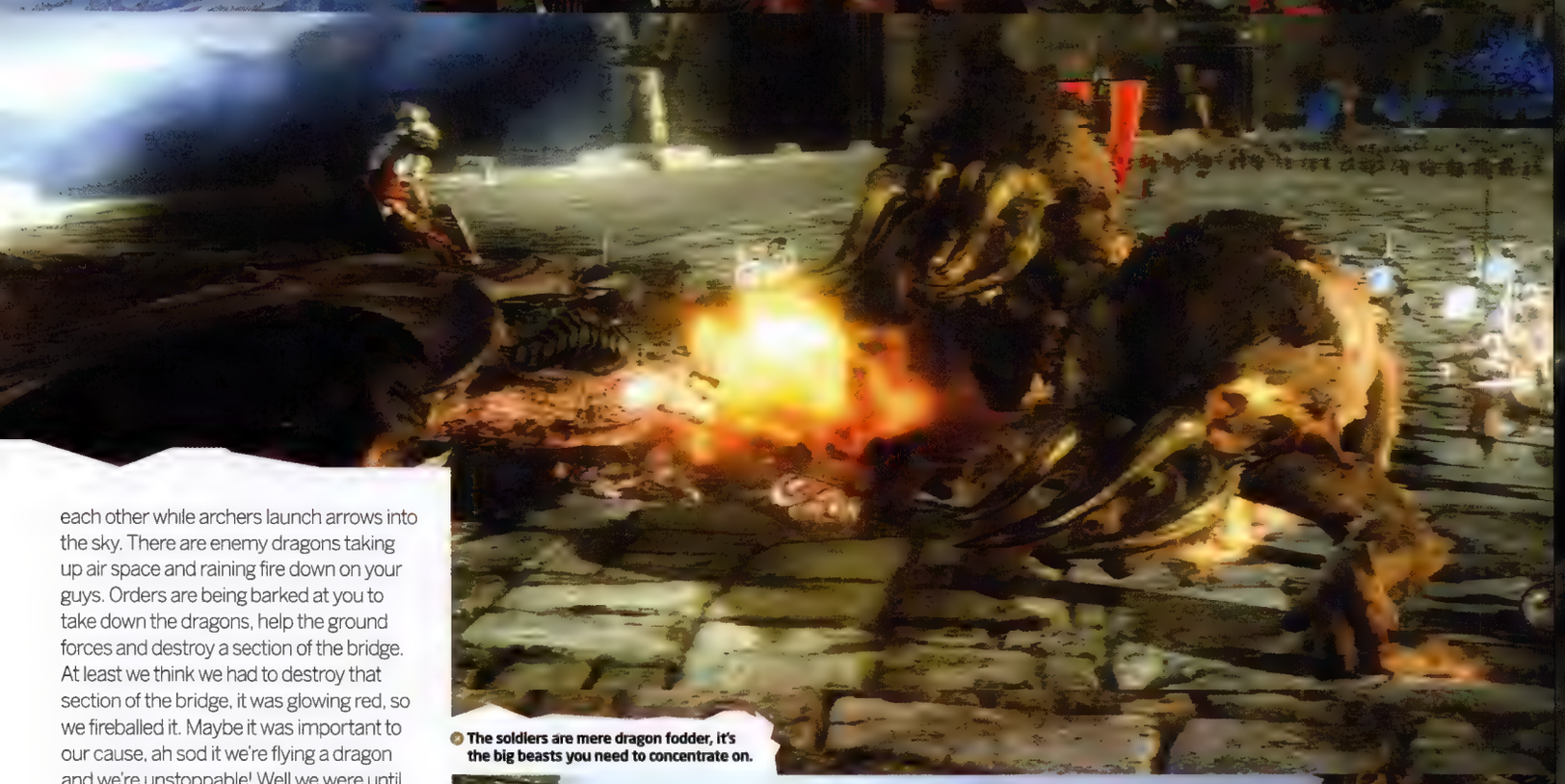
There is a certain sense of majesty about the dragon at times, at other times it's a rather frightening killing machine.

CONTINUATION //

is tilted, perhaps some sort of warning rumble... oh apart from that is never going to actually happen. Although until you learn to only tilt the pad a fraction and not make huge, jerky movements, your dragon is going to be flying all over the place and looking like more like Godzooky than Sean Connery in *Dragonheart*.

After passing through a few more hoops and just as we though we were getting the hang of flying, some other dragons appeared on the horizon and the second part of the tutorial began, this time focusing on attacking, which is much, more fun than flying through hoops. Holding down the L1 and L2 buttons brings up a targeting reticule and once it turns red you can start hurling fireballs at them. It doesn't take too many before your target expires and plummets downwards to say hello to the ground, but when there are a lot of dragons circling you, there's no time to dog fight... *dragon* fight with them. Rather than always tailing after the other dragons you can get up close and personal and rip them to shreds. When locked on you can tap ⊗ to flap the dragon's wings and catch up with them, once you're alongside one of the dragons you can jerk the pad in its direction and your dragon will violently bash into them. Unfortunately, it doesn't matter how hard you jerk the controller, it'll still do the same amount of damage, but after you've attacked it a few times and got its health down you can go in for the kill. The perspective changes and zooms in to a close up of your Dragoner and you can attack the other dragon or its rider by using the pad or the face buttons. Time your attacks with the edges of the screen turning red and you will perform a death move. One of these sees your Dragoner jumping on to the back of the enemy dragon, knocking the other rider off his mount with a whopping big mace and then stabbing the dragon through the skull before jumping off just as his dragon comes screaming in to catch him. It looks so cool. There are more of these death moves to use, some even end with your dragon eating the enemy rider for a very satisfying death and a small health boost. After gobbling up the rest of the dragoners the tutorial was complete and the real war began.

The next level was set on a bridge. A bridge bigger than any bridge you've ever seen, as you fly closer to it you can see that there are hundreds of soldiers milling about on it. Hang on, they're not milling, they fighting! The two opposing armies are having a standoff on the bridge, the frontlines are battling against



The soldiers are mere dragon fodder, it's the big beasts you need to concentrate on.

each other while archers launch arrows into the sky. There are enemy dragons taking up air space and raining fire down on your guys. Orders are being barked at you to take down the dragons, help the ground forces and destroy a section of the bridge. At least we think we had to destroy that section of the bridge, it was glowing red, so we fireballed it. Maybe it was important to our cause, ah sod it we're flying a dragon and we're unstoppable! Well we were until we were ordered to help out the ground troops. Taking out scores of flying lizards? No problem. Trying to land on a massive bridge? Well... one messed-up attempt crashed the game. A few more attempts saw us badly misjudge and all the discipline we'd learnt from the tutorial went flying out the window and we were jerking the controller about like loons to try and line it up again.

Eventually though we hit the ground with a bump, not very graceful for a magnificent creature, but there we were on a dragon towering above everyone else on the bridge. "Pah! Take that, puny humans!" we thought as we were tossing them aside with the dragon's front legs and hurling fire from its mouth. The rest of our army was cheering us on and celebrating in the fiery death we

The mid-air battles can get pretty intense when faced against some of the more powerful dragons.

Look, down on the ground!

It's a dragon taking a stroll!

While much of your time is spent high up in the sky attacking dragons and other flying creatures, you can also breath fire all over the enemy soldiers on the ground, so you're not just limited to attacking from above. Point the pad towards the floor and your dragon will land, its weight cracking the surface beneath, just like bringing a hammer down on an egg. You can then take it for a rampage through the enemy ranks, still breathing fire; but also attacking with the dragon's forelegs, swiping soldiers away and crushing others who cross your path. Once you're finished your destruction on-foot, it's just a simple matter of taking to the skies again and mopping up the rest of them with a ball of fire from above.

When you've got this many winged serpents after you it's a good idea to turn and fly away.

CONTINUATION //

were dishing out, made even easier by the explosive barrels (not red barrels, by the way) the enemy army has left dotted about their ranks, idiots. While you're mowing down the enemy troops it becomes apparent that this has a positive effect on your army as there is a morale meter on the screen. In the finished game when you help them out and turn the tide of the battle it could make your army fight more effectively and maybe even unleash some special attacks. Special attacks like the one the enemy has just launched on us.

The gameplay cuts to a short scene where two huge dragons drop a couple of weird man-bear-pigs onto the bridge. When the

They're not that smart, dragons, put a mirror in front of one and it starts trying to fight its reflection.

boar-like creatures land they immediately start pounding towards us swatting away any soldiers in their path. It's a bit scary really, but after a few swipes with our dragon's claws and the odd fireball or two they soon go down. There doesn't seem to be any special way of killing them, like you do with the dragons, but maybe there will be in the finished game. It would be awesome to mount them and take them for a ride, crushing soldiers beneath their massive hooves.

Once they'd been disposed of, a few more dragons flew into sight but they didn't last long, and that's where the preview code ended. Did we want more? Yup. Of course. We just played it again and took some time to notice everything that was going on. There are some dramatic effects going on that you might miss when you're concentrating on the angle of the Sixaxis controller. Stuff like the high-dynamic range lighting, the progressive mesh and the parallax shaders... what was that other thing that we'll pretend we know all about? Light bloom, that's it. All of that basically boils down to the fact that *Lair* can look very pretty indeed, if it weren't for all the different shades of brown going on. Brown is a horrible colour and while it may have been popular in medieval times (and the Seventies) it's not so nice when it's coming at you in 1080p. Hopefully when we're sitting down to play it properly next year there will be more colourful dragons, bigger explosions and maybe even the occasional Phoenix to claw to bloody pieces.

Perhaps by then we will have sorted out our posture as well. We have terrible posture. Right now we're hunched over a desk typing this, when we're playing games, we're not hunched over, more sprawled on a couch in a sort of reverse hunch. And that's where the problem starts. Because of the tilt controller mechanics and our lazy, lazy back muscles, when we sit back on the couch, the controller in our hands is set at an upwards angle, causing the dragon to fly all the way up to its ceiling height. Not good. You have to keep the pad perpendicular to the floor to keep the dragon flying at the height you want it to. This makes for some strange edge-of-your-seat gaming, where it's not the tension or the sheer excitement that's keeping you there, it's the fact that as soon as you lean anywhere your dragon goes with you. And after a while it just hurts our backs. Perhaps there will be a way to adjust the sensitivity to allow for such laziness, or perhaps *Lair* will come packaged with some sort of back brace or corset when it is released. Made out of the bones of dragons... or we could just learn to sit up straight like our mothers always told us.

Myths and monsters

What else can take down a dragon?

As well as all the other dragons flying gracefully through the sky, until you attack them and they meet the ground, there are other mammoth land-based creatures. They look like an artistic representation of a cross between a manticore, a minotaur and hairy pig. If your army is battling it out and some of these beasts turn up and start ploughing through your men, then you'd better get down there quickly and roast the monstrosities. Throughout *Lair* you can expect many more monsters and dragons that will all be trying to take a bite out of you

Mowing down enemy troops has a positive effect on your army's morale meter

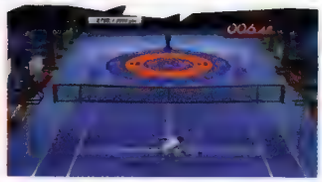
It'll be interesting to see how *Lair* turns out, and whether or not there will be the option to use the pad in a more conventional manner, though that might take away something which makes *Lair* special and different from other games. We can't wait to see what other creatures are included and what the story line of *Lair* is, though. It should be dragon-tastic!

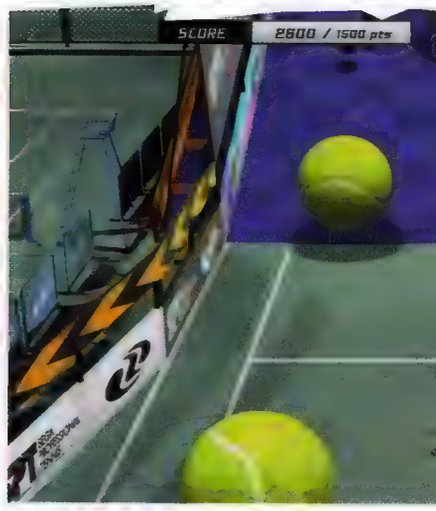
%complete

10 20 30 40 50 51 70 80 90 100

next-GEN MOMENT

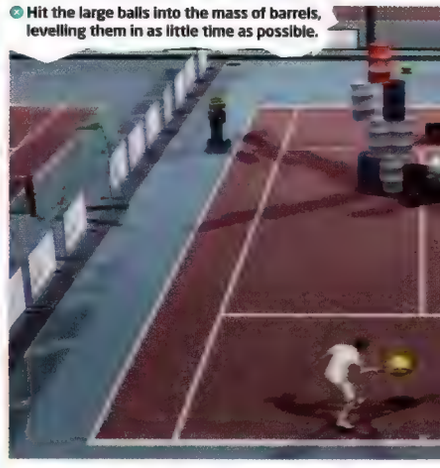
The animation and detail of the models in *VT3* is excellent. Amélie Mauresmo looks a tad manly... so player models are rather accurate, basically. On the field, moving and diving around, AM3 has captured the perfect balance of fast, arcade gameplay and realistic movement in a lovely resolution of 1920x1200.

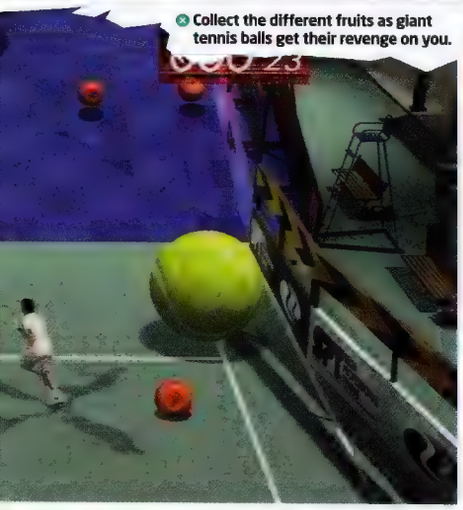




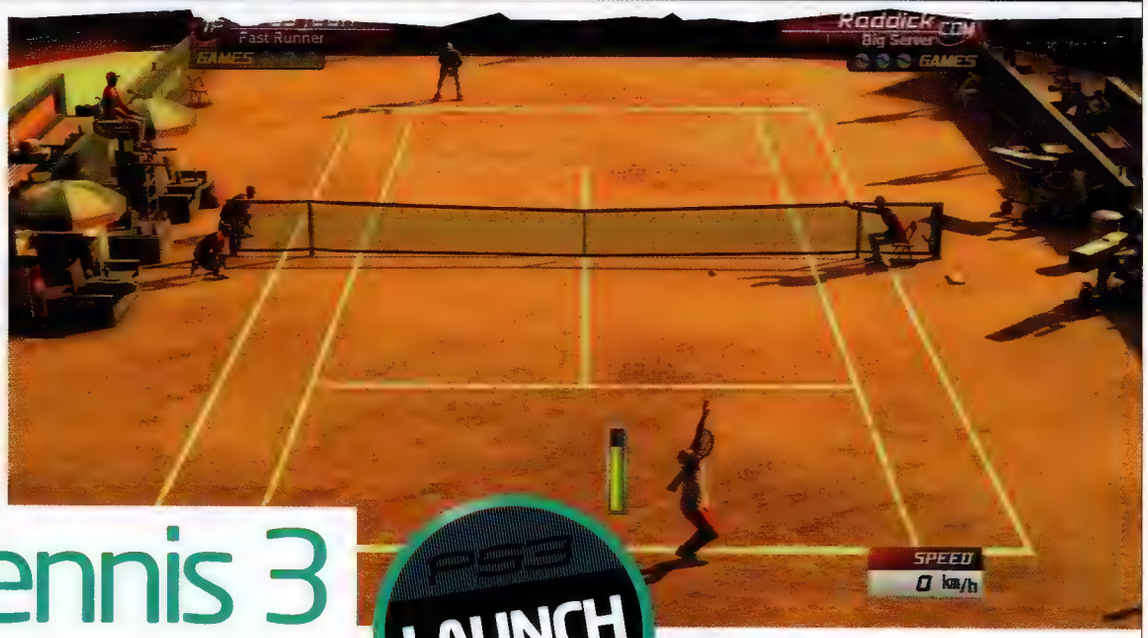
There's nothing wrong with a bit of fighting talk in between sets.

Hit the large balls into the mass of barrels, levelling them in as little time as possible.





Collect the different fruits as giant tennis balls get their revenge on you.



Virtua Tennis 3

Sliced potatoes, bitch!

PS3 LAUNCH GAME

PS3 **Publisher**//Sega **Developer**//Sega AM3 **Genre**//Sports **Players**//1-4
Website//www.sega.com **Release Date**//TBA 2007

THERE are some people in this world who would tell you there's only so much you can do with a tennis game. Those people would be right, of course... which is part of the reason we've embraced *Virtua Tennis 3*'s mini-games so damn much. That and the fact they're bloody mental – but more on them in a bit.

The elegance of *Virtua Tennis* has always been how simple it feels to play, which isn't a criticism; it means most people can pick up and take part in these games with nary a thought spent anywhere other than hitting a ball over the net. That's due to the fact each game has been designed for arcade machines – nevertheless it's translated perfectly to consoles.

But the considerable time between *Virtua Tennis 2* and this next-gen release means AM3 has created a tennis experience more refined than before – one that can be enjoyed by pretty much anyone. Part of that comes in the new Tennis Academy feature, where you take a customisable avatar from a Rookie to Pro rating – accepting various challenges and playing mini-games that improve your statistics, much like previous titles.

As excellent as this is, the other part – and the real delight – comes in the form of the 12 new mini-games. Some of these are reinvented classics, while a majority of them are new. Each can be played in six difficulty levels and with up to four players. There's Avalanche, where you collect falling pieces of fruit as giant tennis balls try to crush you; Bowling, where you aim for a strike by successfully serving; and Curling, perhaps the best mini-game of those we've tried.

The whole of *Virtua Tennis 3* can be played with tilt control but, much like *Tony Hawk's Project 8*, it's not for everyone. You really need time to acclimatise to it. What you won't need time to acclimatise to is *Virtua Tennis 3*'s pitch perfect and user-friendly gameplay, as it's shaping up as good as it always has.

90%

anticipation

Virtua Tennis 3 is barely evolutionary – but it doesn't need to be. It's playing to the same strengths it always has. So is it more of the same? No... it's more of what we *love*.

next DEVELOPER Q+A

Kazuko Noguchi, Lead Producer, AM3

Talking balls with Virtua Tennis 3's leading lady

There has been considerable time between *Virtua Tennis 2* and *3*. What has the extra time enabled AM3 to do?

■ Through the extra time we were able to study the new technology and we had plenty of time to make careful selection of licensed players. We also improved the game engine very much.

Sega's arcade games offer a perfect balance between accessibility and depth. How hard has it been maintaining that for the console version of *Virtua Tennis 3*?

■ The *Virtua Tennis* franchise is easy to play, but it also has depth. In the beginning we had the plan to release this title both in arcades and on consoles, so we prepared to maintain that balance. We think it's well maintained.

How has your time been working with the Playstation 3 hardware?

■ A plus is the high-definition quality. There were also so many options for us to select from that we had to miss some out – but that leaves room for improvement. Since we had good preparation generally there were no real big problems.

Will *Virtua Tennis 3* be online?

■ The mission for the original team was to concentrate on the offline mode as a priority. We had to give up the online part, but if there's a chance in the future franchise for the online mode we'll challenge that.

Is there anything else you wish to add that we may not have covered?

■ There's a reputation that the franchise is very difficult to play. We want to get rid of that and we've made many options available for the users, so that beginners through to advanced players can play as they want to because there is a lot to choose from. We want as many people as possible to buy it. Please look for it!

It's this kind of brutality that The Collective are banking on to hype and sell *Harker*.

Some inspiration for *Harker* came from Friday night closing time at Walkabout

Harker

Hark the herald vampires sing, tra la la la la...

PS3 **Publisher**//TBA **Developer**//The Collective **Genre**//Survival Horror **Players**//1 **Website**// www.collectivestudios.com **Release date**//2008

THE Collective hasn't amazed us in the past, seemingly favouring low-budget productions of high-budget licences like *Indiana Jones*, *Star Wars* and *The Da Vinci Code*. These titles have all had the feel of swiftly cobbled together cash cows, making us a little sceptical of this latest announcement. *Harker*, based on one of the oldest licences around – *Bram Stoker's Dracula* – is looking pretty hot at the moment, but we get the feeling the screens and much of the information around is too early to be reliable, given the 2008 release date. Perhaps a longer lead time could help to improve the general quality of The Collective's work, but we're not holding our breath just yet.

Inspired by the "classic world of *Dracula*", *Harker*'s lead character is Jonathan Harker, who sets about destroying the vampire's world in retribution for the slaying of his beloved wife, Mina. He does this in a survival horror/action style, making the most of his ruthless brutality. Unlike other titles in this genre, your mission is to track and dispatch every vampire around, so you'll have to explore the environments and track the bloodsucking beasts too. The gameplay will involve standard melee combat and an intuitive, yet deadly, system for dealing with the beasts' specific needs, namely putting a stake through their heart. Despite being a little dubious of The Collective's pedigree, we'll still keep a close eye on it throughout the development cycle.

%complete

Expect much *Buffy*-esque vampire dissolving throughout *Harker*.

Rogue Warrior doesn't look all that special at the moment, but given Zombie's pedigree, we reckon it could be the most realistic shooter around.

You'll encounter loads of these deadly trucks on your way through North Korea. Kill, kill, kill!

Rogue maps

Friend or foe?

Rogue Warrior's multiplayer mode is an intriguing prospect, it uses *Unreal 3* streaming technology, therefore enabling players to create up to 200 maps available in both night and daytime. With ten online modes including co-op and the all the regulation Deathmatches, Capture The Flag and Domination options, we're certain this will seize the imagination of the more hardcore military types.

Rogue Warrior

He's not all that rogue really, is he?

PS3 **Publisher**//Bethesda **Developer**// Zombie **Genre**//First-Person Shooter
Players//1-4 **Website**//www.bethsoft.com **Release date**//TBA 2007

WE'D love to have a friend called Dick. That way, when we got a bit bad tempered with him we could call him 'Dick' in a manner that suggested we thought he was being a dick in the vernacular sense of the word. We wouldn't, however, call the author of *Rogue Warrior* and lead character of the videogame of the same name, Dick Marcinko, anything other than Mr Marcinko, or Sir. Why? Well... not only is he the double-hard bastard that managed to work his way up through the ranks of the Navy SEALS to create SEAL team six, the Navy's first counter-terrorist unit, but also, toward the end of his 30-year military career started up Red Cell, the counter-terrorist testing team.

Rogue Warrior follows our man Di... Mr Marcinko through his capture and subsequent escape from North Korea as you try to lead your team to freedom against the odds. Not quite biographical, but Mr Marcinko has had a great deal of input into this endeavour across everything from animation to AI to environments and equipment. What *Rogue Warrior* promises in terms of gameplay is a story-driven tactical shooter with almost completely free battlefields, allowing players to accomplish objectives on their own terms. We've heard all that before though, and somehow it never really comes to fruition. However, if anyone can, we're sure one of the US Navy's great commanders will do it.

%complete

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RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN

All Hale, the new king of PlayStation shooters

Gaming Family Tree

Half-Life PC //1998

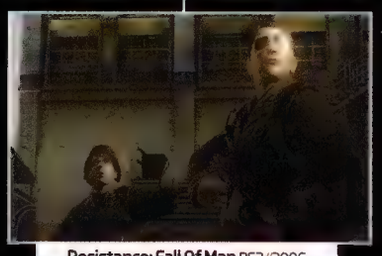
Quake 2 PC //1997

Mario 64 N64 //1997

Spyro PSone //2000

Half Life 2 PC //2004

Halo Xbox //2002


Resistance: Fall Of Man PS3//2006

IMPORT REVIEW
JAPANESE EDITION

PS3 **INFORM**

Publisher Sony
Developer Insomniac Games
Release Date Out now
Price £Import
Players 1-4 (2-40 online)
Genre FPS
Supports 720p, 1080i, Playstation Network, Downloadable content
Age Rating N/A
Website www.insomniacgames.com
Demo Yes

THE FIRST THING to hit you about *Resistance: Fall Of Man* isn't the game's excellent graphics – it's the sheer bloody scale of the thing. If we had to describe *Resistance* in one word it would be this: epic. Many of the locations you'll visit throughout the game's 10 to 12-hour running time are so huge in their appearance and design that any doubts we harboured over Blu-ray and its place in future game development immediately vanished. So when Insomniac's CEO stated it was doing things in the game that just couldn't be achieved on any other platform, the man was telling the truth.

Okay sure, if you concentrate solely on what it consists of, *Resistance* is a PS2 shooter through and through. Strictly speaking, there's nothing gameplay-wise that could have stopped it appearing on Sony's last-gen console. It's only when you factor in the gorgeous visuals, the epic nature of the levels, the dozens of characters frequently appearing on screen in battles or set pieces, the absolute destructive carnage released around you and the fact the game's smooth frame rate doesn't even break a sweat during all this, it's without a doubt a PS3 game.

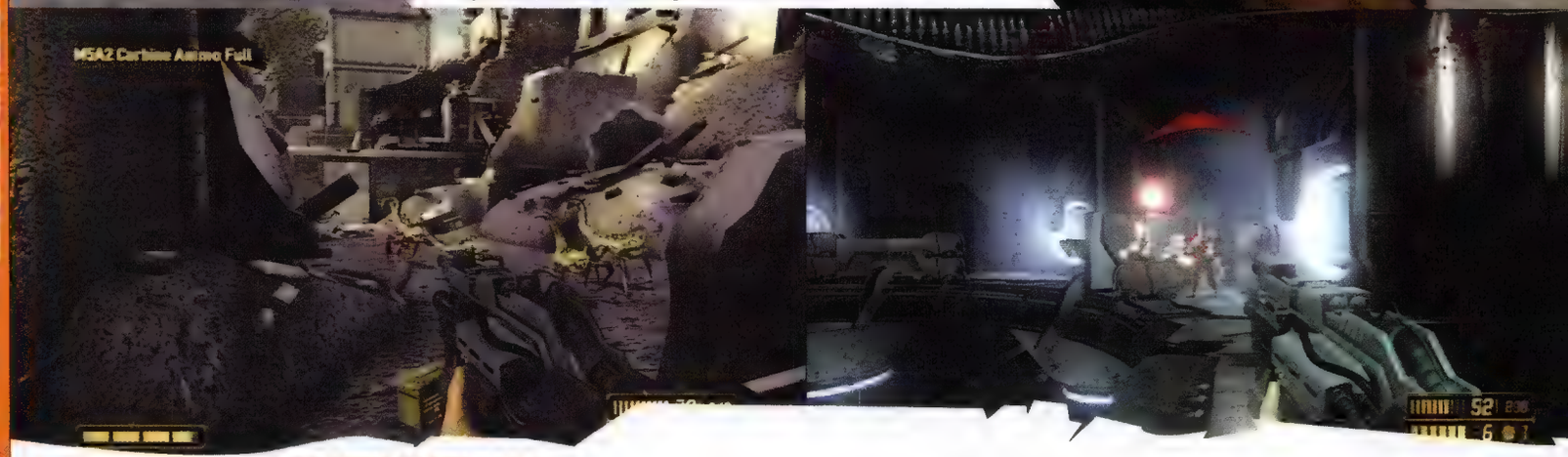
Resistance is also an excellent example of the potential the PS3 holds – giving gamers a glimpse of unprecedented new standards of design that developers can explore on Sony's new machine. Unfortunately for us, these things – as excellent as they are – can't hide the game's shortcomings. Which ultimately leads to the score you'll have no doubt skipped to at the end of this review, but we'll discuss those things later. Instead, let's start at the beginning... the beginning of the end of the world, that is.

Russia in the Thirties. News began to leak out about biological experiments that were being conducted, along with reports of whole towns and cities being destroyed. The British feared the Russians had developed a weapon of unprecedented power, but they couldn't have been farther from the truth. The Chimera – an evil and malevolent force – birthed from a virus of unknown origin, laid waste to everything in its path. The Chimera remained in Russia for over a decade before seeping out and slowly taking over Europe. The UK was saved for last. Finally, they burrowed under the channel and emerged on British soil – decimating our forces and destroying most of the country in just three months.

England in the Fifties. As a last-ditch attempt to reclaim our glorious country, the

Profile
HALE

Enemy AI and combat is pretty basic - depending on the breed - the Chimera will either run or shuffle towards you, duck and cover or strafe. In this department, *Resistance* falls way below *Halo*'s standard.



There are two kinds of leapers... you don't want to see the other kind. Ever. Make sure you gun them down!

CONTINUATION //

Americans launched an assault on our Eastern shores. Among the second wave of soldiers sent to liberate us was Nathan Hale – a soldier whose actions would become legendry in the fight against the Chimera oppression. *Resistance: Fall Of Man* follows Hale's arrival from 11–14 July – the last time anyone ever saw Hale alive again.

Resistance makes zero allusions to being anything other than a fast-paced first-person shooter with a clear emphasis on shooting. As soon as control is handed to you, you're gunning down several Chimera Hybrids and the pace remains relentless from then on. Design-wise it's nothing you've ever seen in a game of this ilk before and it doesn't try to hide it. You're lead by the nose from one encounter to the next – each, naturally, of varying size and threat. There's very little downtime in *Resistance*, what with you always having something to shoot – but that doesn't mean you can't afford yourself any. Various intelligence reports are littered throughout the environment, and collecting these reveals background information on the Chimera and the alternate world history that Insomniac has envisioned for the game.

Speaking of which, its story and plot is one of the first areas where you can criticise *Resistance*. First of all, we're presented with the perfect hook: an alternate world history set in Britain during the Fifties – where there was no World War II. However, as far as the alternate history and the British setting is concerned, none of it is realised to its full potential. Given everything that unfolds in the game and the places you visit, *Resistance* could easily be set today, or even in the future. You do visit some well-known locations, such as a gorgeous frozen version of the River Thames, which is also one of the best sections of the game; but the majority of them are just one long corridor after another, or one giant outdoor set piece that could be anywhere on the British map.

Take Bristol. This is one of the most jaw-dropping areas in the game – huge and sprawling with tons of Chimera architecture buried deep inside a crater. But there's nothing signifying this is actually the place the game tells you it is. It could be any number of locations. Some people, especially in this country, will appreciate the tour-guide nature of the locations you're going to visit – as it really is a country-hopping adventure. But when a large amount of the levels are this faceless, you have to ask why Insomniac even bothered. Sure, it's difficult to gauge what a city or town that exists today might have looked like in the Fifties, let alone an alternate version that wasn't at all affected by the War, but more individualism in the locations would have been appreciated. And the well-known red telephone boxes in Manchester do not constitute individualism.

The Chimera, as an enemy, is a wholly intriguing bunch. You can tell Insomniac thought very hard about the perfect enemy to insert into this fiction but, again, it's something that doesn't hit the heights it could – and should – have hit. Early in the game you're taken to a conversion centre and it's one of the

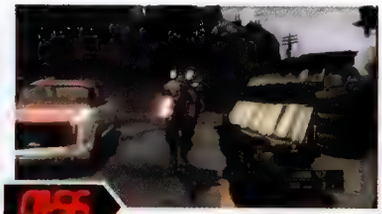
FIRST LEVEL TIMEWATCH

Resistance: Fall Of Man's opening level complete in under ten mins

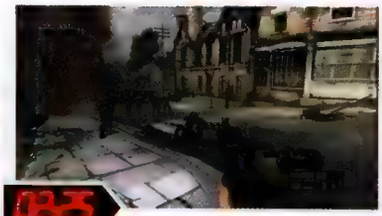
While *Resistance* isn't the hardest or most taxing first-person shooter we still feel that a walk through the first level is a good way to establish the visceral and destructive world Insomniac has created. Join us as we kick much arse. For freedom!

00:41 As the first level opens, after a lengthy cinematic, we are treated to this short scene of insubordination. Next it's over the hill to war!

01:31 There's so much happening at times in *Resistance* that, when it is this hectic it is very easy to sometimes miss it all. Here, a carrier jet explodes.



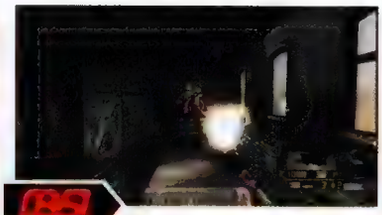
01:56 After witnessing the still-burning soldiers trying to escape the crashed carrier wreckage a stubborn Chimera Hybrid decides to take his chances.



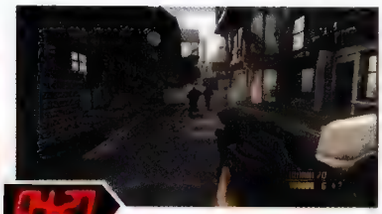
03:35 Another epic sequence, where over a dozen soldiers head to the conflict zone while cars explode, people die and Chimera shoot.

02:54 A set piece we've become all too familiar with here at Next3 after having played it so many bloody times. Just kill the suckers.

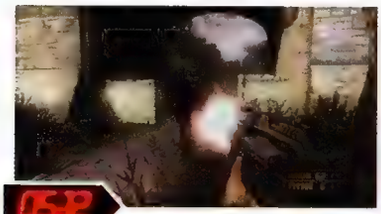
03:19 Thankfully you only have to contend with about a half dozen Hybrids so making short work of them is no problem at all.



03:39 Entering a nearby home and working your way upstairs brings you to yet another encounter with Chimera Hybrids. These guys are easy.



04:27 Yes! A new weapon! The brilliant Bullseye is your first accruement and you get to test it in no time at all. Three Hybrids assault your position.



05:12 Even more Hybrids appear, just as stupid and suicidal as the last bunch. Again, your Bullseye proves unchallengeable.

05:24 Check the clock. These guys don't stand a chance, not when you're playing it on Easy, anyway... what? Why are you laughing?

05:58 After that short skirmish your fellow soldiers await your arrival at the bottom of a hill. Onwards and upwards and all that...

06:18 ...only not. As the first level comes to an end a surprise is in store for Hale and his fellow soldiers. Which we won't spoil for you...

SUMMARY: IT'S A GOOD OPENER THAT SUMS UP THE GAME'S ETHOS PERFECTLY: FAST-PACED, ACTION-PACKED AND RELENTLESS IN ITS PACE.

absolute standout moments in *Resistance*. Amidst shooting dozens of Chimera Hybrids and Menials (imagine a zombie version of a hybrid that, much like its undead cousin, isn't at all scary on its own but is absolutely terrifying when surrounded by dozens... which *will* happen) you're taken through the three main stages of Chimera conversion.

You watch, helplessly, as unfortunate human victims drift through long vents and pools of blue liquid, slowly changing into different kinds of Chimera through each process. It's stunning to see and tricks you into thinking *Resistance* is going to set up and establish the Chimera as a three-dimensional threat. It hints at a fiction just as strong as *Half Life 2*'s – with an enemy that could be as stunning as the Combine. But hinting is all it does. Once the Chimera has been set up at the end of the game's hypothetical First Act, it's then a case of simply pointing and shooting, sometimes harking as a new Chimera is introduced into the game. You're not even given a clear description of where the hell the Chimera came from – which screams sequel, much like other aspects of the game.

"You can tell Insomniac thought very hard about the perfect enemy to insert into this fiction"

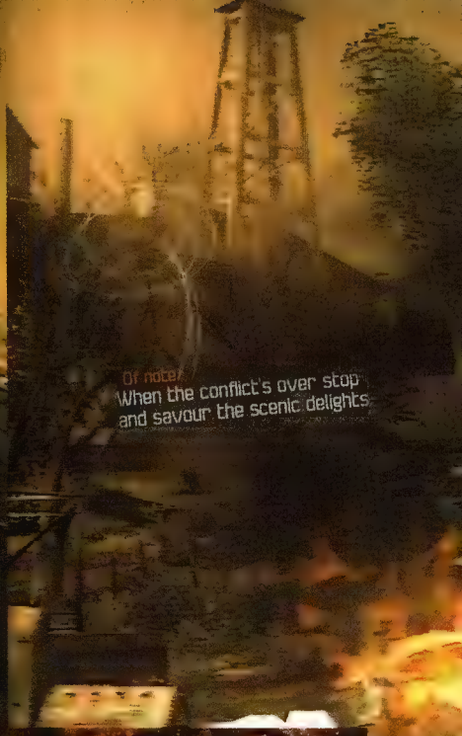
It's unfortunate as Insomniac has proven itself adept at tackling stories with its *Ratchet & Clank* series. But the one in *Resistance* is, unfortunately, more cookie cutter than classic fodder. In-game cut-scenes are sparse and short and the ones connecting levels – consisting of black and white photography and a voice-over from Parker, a female character you meet in the conversion centre – do little to hide the staccato structure of *Resistance*. Despite its cinematic presentation, the narrative merely works to link the disparate levels together. Within each, dialogue consists of telling you where to go next – which is redundant given how linear the game is anyway – or to highlight what's happening in areas away from where you currently are.

It also has a really annoying knack of arbitrarily showing you things that, despite being unquestionably excellent, would have been even more so if you could happen upon them yourself. The conversion centre is a good example of this, as is Bristol and about a dozen other levels. One of our favourite set pieces of all time is *Half Life 2*'s nod to the first game's opening tram sequence; the tour through the Citadel. You just happen to fall into it and are then taken through the best three minutes of arguably the greatest FPS ever created.

Sure, *Half Life 2* features a wholly different ethos to *Resistance*, but there are things that may have been almost as memorable as the Citadel tour had Insomniac not chosen to open the majority of these levels with a first-person cut-scene where Hale goes and inspects them himself. Turning a corner in the conversion

Profile

PARKER



nextGen

What defines this game as a 'Next-Gen' Playstation 3 title?

The scope of the levels

1 The scope of some of the levels adds a real epic feeling to *Resistance*, going a long way to immersing you in the action. The game could work on the PS2 no problem, but it wouldn't have the same scale as this.

The art of creating beautiful next-generation glass

2 It sounds like such a throwaway feature but the glass effects are unbelievable. If there's one thing *Resistance* does well, it's glass. The first time you discover how reactionary it is you will spend ages shooting windows.

A taste of war that includes horrible monsters

3 Forget *Call Of Duty 3* because *Resistance*, irrespective of genre, paints a wonderful picture of what it feels like to be at war. That's war with horrible monsters, but it's still war nonetheless. The skirmish in Manchester is particularly visceral.

CONTINUATION//

centre and finding humans floating through tubes and being converted into Chimera, or discovering the massive open vista that is the Bristol crater, would have been more impressive than what actually happens. It almost feels like Insomniac knows such things are the money in *Resistance* – but can't help congratulating itself by clearly pointing them out to you. "Look at what we did! See this? Isn't it cool?!" Yes... yes it is. But back off next time and let us bloody find it for ourselves, yeah?

Something also has to be said of the latter sections of the game. *Resistance* arguably peaks in its middle portion and would have easily continued until the end, had Insomniac not chosen to cheapen the difficulty by throwing even more waves of enemies at you. Don't get us wrong – it doesn't exactly peter out once you hit that last portion, but the repetition of set pieces does begin to grate. The first time you get surrounded by Menials, indulge in a spot of vehicular action, shoot a gang of horrible Leapers; take on a giant rocket-launching Chimera or fight against a Stalker make for some of the most memorable sequences in *Resistance* (in particular the latter. The first time you fight the Stalker is in Manchester in a massive open environment, where there's tons of stuff going on). Insomniac chooses to pace the introduction of new enemies a little prematurely, meaning it has to re-use various encounters several times later on, well after they've lost the charm they had originally. We'll also be surprised if you aren't as bored with Hybrids as we were by the end of it all.

The introduction of an upgrade to the Bullseye, one of the best weapons in the game, brings with it thoughts of even more delightful combat as you suddenly get the edge on your enemies. But that delight is short-lived when new enemies wielding said upgrade suddenly appear. Insomniac then makes the mistake of upping the amount of these – throwing wave after wave at you until you meet the copy and pasted final set piece. So you aren't just facing powerful enemies anymore; in most circumstances you're facing over a dozen, which is just unfair. The upgrade is introduced so close to the end that it feels like a last-ditch attempt to add some diversity. It works, but the charm soon vanishes.

Finally, something has to be said of the corridor-shooter nature of *Resistance*. Irrespective of the scale of the game and how much it wows you with wide-open vistas and epic locations, you are still being led, quite clearly by the nose, from point A to B. You can paint it up however you want but *Resistance* is resolutely linear. Sure, there are several arena-like levels in the game, but you're never lead

The Big Brown Warzone

Some of the battlefields are so massive that, at first, it's a little daunting fighting through them. This is one such battle and it comes relatively early in the game. It's not the best either – but we figured we would rather show you this than spoil the others.

Always remember your first

This is the first real set piece in the game, and depending on the difficulty you're playing on (we recommend Normal over Easy), you're going to find it a bit of a struggle.

to these. You don't start at point A and end where B is the arena; thus making the level design a little bit more diverse. The arenas are levels in and of themselves, preceded and succeeded by a Parker narration that tries to connect the disparate county-hopping going on. Which is disappointing. But, thankfully, that's where the disappointment ends.

As we mentioned at the beginning of this review, *Resistance* makes no allusions to being anything other than a solid, consistently entertaining shooter. Part of that is, naturally, the weapons you get to wield – and in that respect this game is peerless. Insomniac has made a name for itself throughout its *Ratchet & Clank* titles as a pioneer in excellent weapon design. *Resistance* continues that trend. The Bullseye is a weapon that many became aware of at the final E3 show, where the ability to 'tag' an enemy by hitting alternate fire, and therefore direct all subsequent bullets on their direction, became a very popular revelation. The good news is that *Resistance* features more insane weapons than just the Bullseye, each of them with powerful – and different – alternate fire modes. It's a mix of classic human and Chimera weapons – and every gamer is likely to have their favourite.

There's the Sniper rifle, which is a standard one-shot killer if you manage a headshot, otherwise it'll take a couple to bring most enemies down. Chimera move around a lot, but you thankfully have the ability to increase your chances of success by holding L1 and having temporary slowdown – a side effect of the Chimera virus Hale becomes infected with (which means, to avid readers of the magazine, that when we played the guessing game in our preview back in issue 2 – we were pretty much on the money. Slow clap, please).

The Hailstorm is perhaps our favourite weapon. It's also one of the more visually delightful weapons on offer. It's a rapid-fire weapon with green ricocheting buttons; that means firing it blindly into a full room usually presents you with devastating results. However, what's even better is the alternate fire, which launches a swirling mass of bullets into the air and creates a makeshift auto-turret. The shotgun is single barrel but it's nonetheless a powerful beast with a two-shot alternate fire.

The Auger is another rapid-fire weapon but this one enables you to shoot through walls

THE CONTROL SYSTEM

ABOUT THE CONTROL SYSTEM: We miss the rumble feature a lot and in a game such as this that becomes readily apparent almost immediately. Irrespective of what Phil Harrison says, the rumble feature would have been a good way to gauge the different fire rates and power of weapons – as well as when you get hit, bitten or attacked by an enemy. Sure, the Sixaxis feels perfectly fine and the tilt function is implemented really well. But we do miss that rumble

Sixaxis feels good enough, but we really do miss the jolt of a gun's recoil.

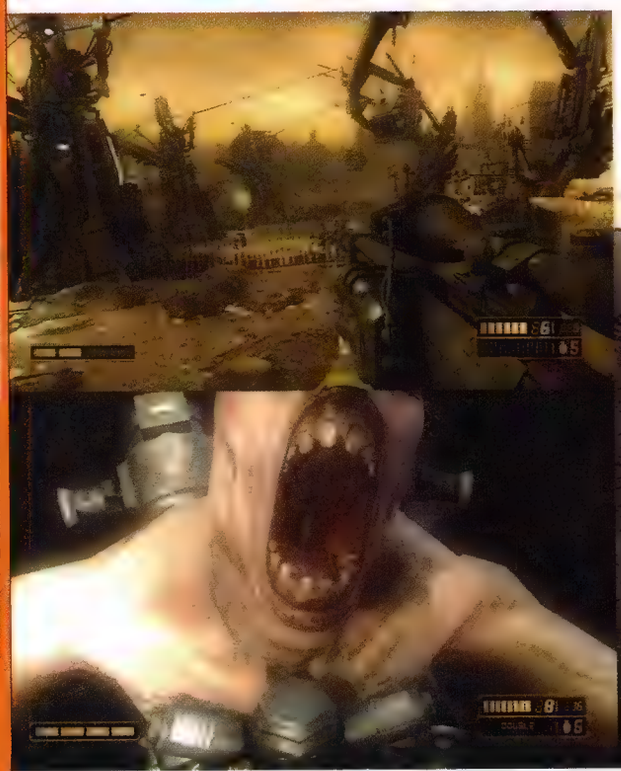
"Resistance makes no allusions to being anything other than a solid, consistently entertaining shooter"

Profile

HYBRID

The most common enemy in *Resistance* and the one you'll likely come to tire of very easily. We'd be surprised if you didn't. They look cool but they're dumb and boring after a while

Resistance's button configuration leaves a lot to be desired - with the melee attack you have to take your thumb off the right analogue (the 'look around' stick) to press Ⓐ, making this attack extremely inaccurate. Still it's more powerful than a bullet.



"The only way you can fault the weapons is that there aren't more of them on your first run-through"

Compare the texture detail in this shot above to *anything* on PlayStation 2. Now that's where some of the PS3's immense power has gone.

CONTINUATION //

– as evidenced by your reticule turning red whenever you target something through a partition. The alternate fire is also extremely cool, launching a temporary shield in front of you that you can shoot through.

However, suffer no delusions – there are enemies that wield the same weapon and can also unleash the same attacks and defences on you. The XR-0003 Sapper is perhaps the most bizarre gun in the game. It launches cluster mines that stick to any surface and then swell up, exploding after a time. You can, of course, blow them up yourself with the alternate fire – which works a treat against Stalkers (as does tagging their weak spot with the Bullseye).

There are more, obviously, but we're running out of space. Just know that the weapons in *Fall Of Man* accrue to form one of the best arsenals in a shooter in such a long time. Even the bloody grenades are excellent – one of which emits a gas cloud that ignites and burns to a crisp any enemies caught in the cloud. The only way you can fault the weapons is that there aren't more of them on your first run-through. That's how good a job Insomniac has done. Thankfully, like most Insomniac games, there is a wealth of unlockable extras – including more weapons.

These, of course, can all be wielded in the game's co-operative and multiplayer components. As well as its excellent co-op mode (that can only be played in vertical split-screen, unfortunately) *Resistance* supports a fully-fledged 40-player multiplayer. You can play as either human or Chimera characters and it comprises of maps based on locations from the single-player game – some of which cater for up to eight players, while others go the full extent to offer you 40.

There are six different kinds of game, from deathmatch, team deathmatch, to a last-man-standing mode called Conversion, plus more. While the co-op is undeniably fun and the single-player offers an engrossing and fulfilling – if slightly disappointing – experience, it is definitely the multiplayer that will offer the most longevity to *Resistance: Fall Of Man*. When the games are finally released here, it's more than likely that

HOW TO...

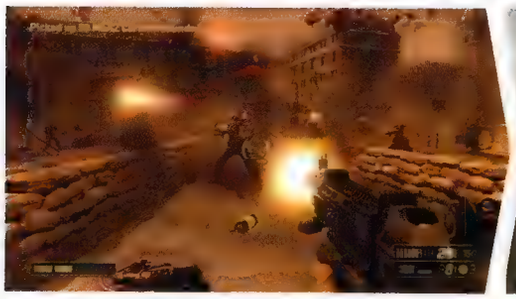
Survive the Siege of Manchester

Easily one of the best, most epic sequences in Resistance, Manchester is also one of the toughest. Sit back and let Next3 take you through the various steps to victory.

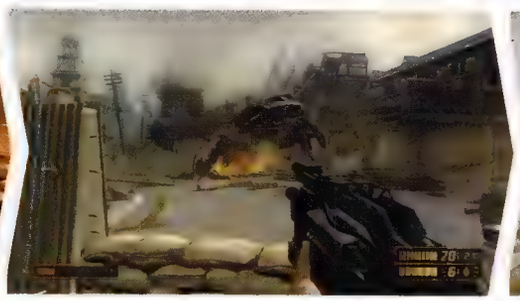
1 This is a very apt title for the conflict you're about to step into. Get ready to tackle swarms of enemies and one very big, very special pseudo-boss at the end.

2 The arbitrary look over the battlefield is a good indication of what you can expect to go up against. That is, complete carnage and tonnes of Chimera Hybrids.

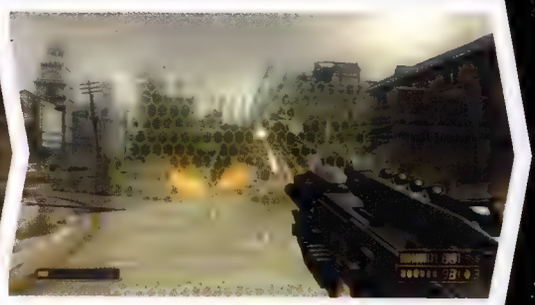
3 The first thing to do, while stationed behind the cover, is select which weapon you want to take into war. Given how good the Carbine assault rifle is we chose that.



4 The distance you wish to assault the enemy from is subjective to the player - but given our gung ho nature, we got as up close and personal as possible.



5 The real fun begins when the Stalker shows up. This guy is easy later in the game, but that's because you have the weaponry to match his. But here he's completely deadly.



6 We recommend using the Auger's alternate fire mode for close situations such as this. The temporary shield will save you from the Stalkers heavy rapid fire attacks.

7 This is the area you'll want to be aiming for at all cost. And what best way to ensure you constantly hit it than using the Bullseye's tagging function?

8 The courtyard is a good place to tag the Stalker and then hide behind, as you can keep your bullets heading for but strafe at the same time.

9 We enough distance between you and the Stalker and some successful tagging you'll have the Stalker reduced to rubble in no time. Until you have to face two later in the game.

SUMMARY: THIS SECTION IS INFINITELY REPLAYABLE, BUT THIS IS HOW NEXT3 DID IT.

MotorStorm and *Resistance* will be the two greatest online games for the Playstation 3 for some time.

We're all aware of how much Sony is putting into *Resistance*, and no one is denying the fact it's going to flog a large number of PS3s – but it's for good reason. *Resistance: Fall Of Man* is a solid and wholly entertaining game. It understands that its best strength lies in its weapons and the act of shooting things, and it plays to that. Like we said at the beginning of this review, it's a first-person shooter with the emphasis put purely on shooting. No, it isn't perfect and we've pointed that out quite clearly. The game's problems have been enough to affect the score somewhat drastically and that's likely going to piss off many readers who were expecting great things from it. But *Resistance* is not the PS3's *Halo* – at least not yet. It's thankfully not its *Perfect Dark Zero* either. What it is, however, is a franchise that needs a bit of work.

Forget *Killzone* and the fact Sony believes anyone still gives a damn about it because, in time, *Resistance* could be one hell of a PS3 franchise here... one that could even rival Bungie's *Halo* if Insomniac finds a way to ditch the crap that plagues the game and puts a focus on story and immersion. But at this moment in time, looking specifically at the single-player component, *Resistance* is a seven-out-of-ten game. Factor in the excellent co-op and the extensive multiplayer and it's an eight – a solid and entirely respectable eight. Is it the best game in the launch line-up? Sure, why not. But when you look at that line-up and the games we've reviewed this issue, you'll see that's not entirely excellent acclaim. But with a little work, Insomniac could have a sequel that is the best game you can get on the console.

Craig Gilmore

next3 verdict

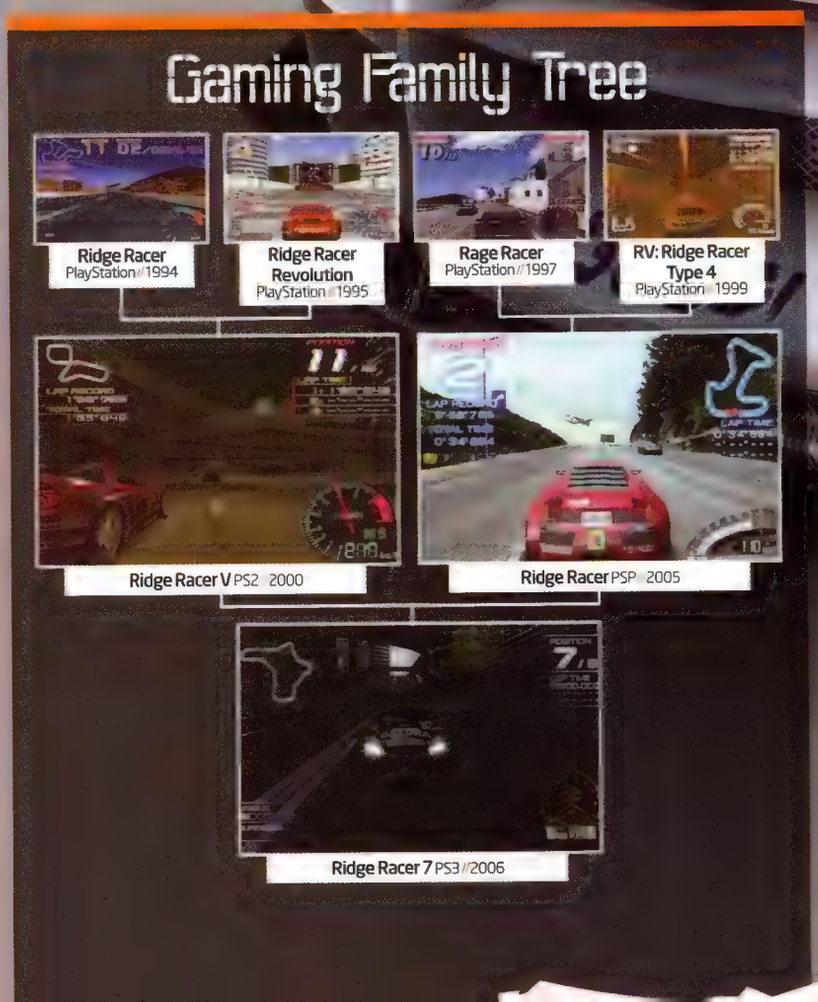
OVERALL COMMENT

Despite our harsh criticisms, *Resistance* is a fast-paced, consistent and entertaining game. It doesn't try to be anything else beyond that - which is where it falls.

08
OUT OF 10

RIDGE RACER 7

It's still drifting around that same corner



IMPORT REVIEW
JAPANESE EDITION

INFORM

Publisher: Namco Bandai

Developer: In-house

Release Date: March (Out Now Jap/US)

Price: £Import

Players: 1-2 (2-14 online multiplayer)

Genre: Racing

Supports: 1080p, 720p, Dolby Digital, Playstation Network, Downloadable content

Age Rating: N/A

Website: namco-ch.net/ridgeracer7/

Demo: No

THERE are certain events that define a console's launch. Although the latest trend is to struggle with hardware and fail to get the required amounts on to shelves to please all consumers, there are other circumstances that make a machine's market debut feel slightly more special. This, of course, is the software that marches over the hill with the console, standing behind it every step of the way and ready to help it push forward whenever it can. The Playstation 3's release list is certainly an impressive sight to behold. Brand new IPs such as *Resistance: Fall Of Man* and *MotorStorm* seem destined to cement themselves as future franchises, and well-known multiformat series like *Call Of Duty* and *Tony Hawk* are along for the ride as well. However, there's only one third-party game that has to be released alongside the console. Although others would be sorely missed, if a *Ridge Racer* title hadn't been standing side-by-side with the PS3, there would be an uproar from thousands of fans who are dying for a dose of unreal drifting action.

Just in case you were unaware of such facts, a *Ridge Racer* game has been released alongside each of Sony's launches. PSone, PS2, PlayStation Portable and now Playstation 3 have all received Namco's arcade racer on day one and it's arguably an important reason for some of Sony's console sales, particularly in Japan.

The inaugural title – named *Ridge Racer*, surprisingly – was ported over from the-then extremely popular arcade machine and has managed to successfully improve on its already stellar and innovative racing style. *Ridge Racer V*, which launched alongside the PS2, had a similar impact and is still touted as the best in the series by many today. The PSP continued this trend and *Ridge Racer* (*Ridge Racers* in Japan) stunned consumers in early part of 2005 with its exceptional graphics and ability to offer the same kind of depth seen by previous console outings.

Finally, we have *Ridge Racer 7*. Being the seventh in the series is never going to be an easy task, especially when previous jaunts have proven as popular as they have. Does it manage to uphold the trusted legacy of its elders, or has

Profile

HARDCORE

When you've got nothing but open road, the polite thing to do is to hit the nitrous and put your foot down.

They certainly seem to be driving through a residential area - very dangerous indeed.

CONTINUATION//

Namco Bandai ruined its number one racing franchise? The answer's a little more blurry than you may think.

Ridge Racer 7, in essence, is no different from any other game in its series. From the moment you attempt your first corner, lift your finger off the accelerator and beautifully drift around the solid concrete, you'll be hard-pressed to wipe the silly smirk off your face. The truly cynical amongst you will argue that the exact same sensation was triggered back in 1994, so *Ridge Racer* may be viewed as going a bit stale, or that it has already done so. These criticisms are entirely valid. At the core of *RR7* lies the tried and tested gameplay that featured in the original over a decade ago. You accelerate like a madman down the straights and use a combination of this speed and brake power to drift unrealistically around a bend. Considering the expectations people have thrown at the PS3, it's not a good sign of things to come. Despite this, those who live for the series will appreciate the unchanged formula. You'll still need the right set of skills to successful master the art of drifting, and those who decide that 'seventh time's a charm' and pick it up for their first play will have to put in a lot of practice before the concept becomes familiar to them.

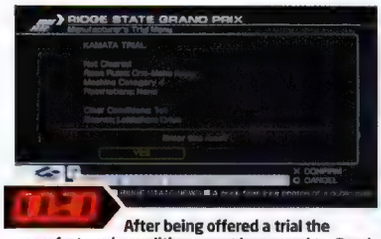
Some of the more difficult tracks require a ridiculous amount of precision and technical ability; so despite its basic premise, there's actually a steep learning curve embedded into the game. There are also different types of drifts, so the steering whores out there will be in their element. The dynamic drift is probably the hardest of the bunch – as you enter a bend your car will easily begin to drift but will start to lose its grip very quickly, so you need to be as precise as possible while taking the corner. The mild drift flips this method on its head, giving you outstanding grip but will then see your car struggle while trying to drift, and when it does it'll take things as slow. The standard drift is what beginners and those getting used to the game's mechanics will want to opt for. It sits nicely between dynamic and mild, so you should find getting the hang of it pretty easy.

Fleshing out the drifting experience even more is the use of nitrous – it's just as important as ever. To ensure you've got a healthy supply of the liquid you'll have to frequently be successful with your drifts, and a large supply is needed in order to destroy the competition. This is due to the various kind of nitrous that can be activated while racing. You can use it straight away for an average burst of speed, but there's also the option to save up a supply to then trigger a double or even a triple boost. The truly hardcore among you will want to try and master the 'ultimate charge' nitrous technique. If you manage to enter a drift just as your nitrous expires, your meter will fill up twice as fast. This adds an excellent strategic element to *RR7* and, again,

FIRST LEVEL TIMEWATCH

There's something ever so familiar about this... Comfortable, maybe?

So, you've put the *Ridge Racer* disc in the PS3 and are ready to roll. Once you've accessed the RSGP mode you'll have to start by accepting one of three manufacturer trials. We chose the Kamata, single-race trial on Lakeshore Drive and here's out it played out...



0:20 After being offered a trial the manufacturer's conditions must be agreed to. Read the rules, take note of the requirements for success and get ready to burn rubber.

0:00 Nothing says *Ridge Racer* like a red, sleek machine such as this. Although the choice of vehicles increases as you progress, this is the only car available at present.

0:41 The majestic view of Lakeshore Drive; it's a deliberately straightforward course to ease veterans back into the game and give newbies a taste of things to come.

0:20 There's no turning back now. It's time to press down on the accelerator (or the ⊗ button) and aim to finish in first place to get in Kamata's good books.

0:29 After successfully moving up two positions, another car shunts right in an attempt to block the way forward. It's an impressive move by the A.I.

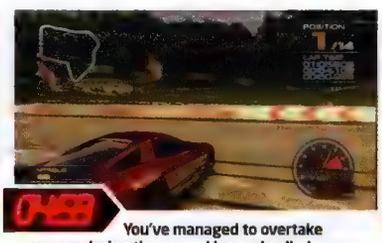
0:40 After getting the best of the aggressive driver, the nitrous meter is now full and is it's impossible to resist the urge. It's feels good, but it does seem like it could be a lot faster.

0:48 Before the thrill of the boost has worn off, the first major corner of the course rears its head. It's easy to drift around and doesn't cause too many problems.

0:39 Using a combination of good drifting and well-timed bursts of nitrous will help you advance through the ranks. With one lap to go, events seem to be going pretty well.

0:48 When the lead is in sight, executing a double boost successfully will put you right behind the front three. They should be relatively easy to pass so long as you maintain this speed.

0:48 After flying down the straight, you activate your remaining nitrous while entering a drift. It will help you round the last bend and put you at the head of the pack.



0:58 You've managed to overtake everyone during the second lap and pulled away significantly from the rest of the pack in the third. Do not get cocky and oversteer.

0:58 Despite the mistake, the win is still there for the taking. Kamata are now interested in you and will start selling you some nice new machines and parts.

SUMMARY: EVEN IF YOU MAKE A FEW MISTAKES, YOU WON'T BE PUNISHED SEVERELY. IT CAN FEEL A BIT BORING, BUT IT'S STILL A NICE INTRODUCTION TO THE GAME.

veterans will want to learn this as soon as possible to ensure they finish ahead of the pack and with some very impressive times.

Namco still isn't done and enhance the game even further with a new slipstream element. For those who don't consider themselves to be racing addicts, slipstreaming is positioning your vehicle behind another to reduce the amount of drag on your car. Do this for a considerable amount of time and you'll be able to slingshot in front of your rival. It may not be a new feature in racing titles, but it still works well. In the left-hand corner of the screen is a slipstream gauge that lets you know whether you're using it for your own advantage, or if an opponent is trying to use it against you. As you would expect, it encourages you to try and drive as close as possible to the car in-front as doing so will inevitable help you move up the rankings; a clever and very much-needed addition.

Of course, all of these additions individually aren't enough to justify it as a true sequel in the series. Trying to beef it up as much as possible, its main single-player mode has been well thought-out and is quite in-depth. The Ridge State Grand Prix, or RSGP, presents itself as a career mode of sorts and will challenge you to take part in numerous races to try and win cash and raise your 'fame points'. There are also UFRA single events and manufacturer trials; but you'll find the majority of your time will be spent frolicking in the RSGP. Set up like your standard racing league, you'll challenge eight other cars in a series of races and the driver with the most points at the end wins the Grand Prix. There's a world map full of different events on offer and as you unlock more every time you win a RSGP, you'll have to give yourself enough time to plough through them all.

"At the core of RR7 lies the gameplay that featured in the original over a decade ago"

The true addiction of the single-player mode stems from the manufacturer trials. From the start, a few companies will want you to take part in a race using one of their cars so they can see if you're worthy enough to own such a prestigious item. If you do happen to be successful, then that manufacturer's stock will become available to you. From there, if you decide to race with one of their products in an RSGP and can make it to first place, they'll begin to grow quite attached to you and continue to throw stock your way. Of course, you have to pay for it, but it's a nice way of feeling like you're achieving something as you progress. It won't just be cars that become available to you, though. Thankfully, Namco Bandai has brought back the customisation options that were last present in *Ridge Racer*

Profile

RAVE ON

Head-to-head
With the right background, speed and foe, *Ridge Racer 7* can be rather intense. As you can see, the nitrous meter is almost full, but using it prematurely may put you in a position where the car behind can attempt to take advantage of the slipstream system.

nextGen
What defines this game as a 'Next-Gen' Playstation 3 title?

Polished to perfection
1 Although not up to the standard they should be, there's no way the PlayStation 2 could have made *Ridge Racer* look like this. The resolution is extremely sharp, the colours are vibrant and it all looks very polished.

When HD isn't HD enough, there's always True HD!

2 To be honest, besides the upgraded graphics there's not a lot here that is next gen. It can run in 1080p and has HDMI support, but that doesn't really define the next level of gaming.

Playstation Networking with people all over the world

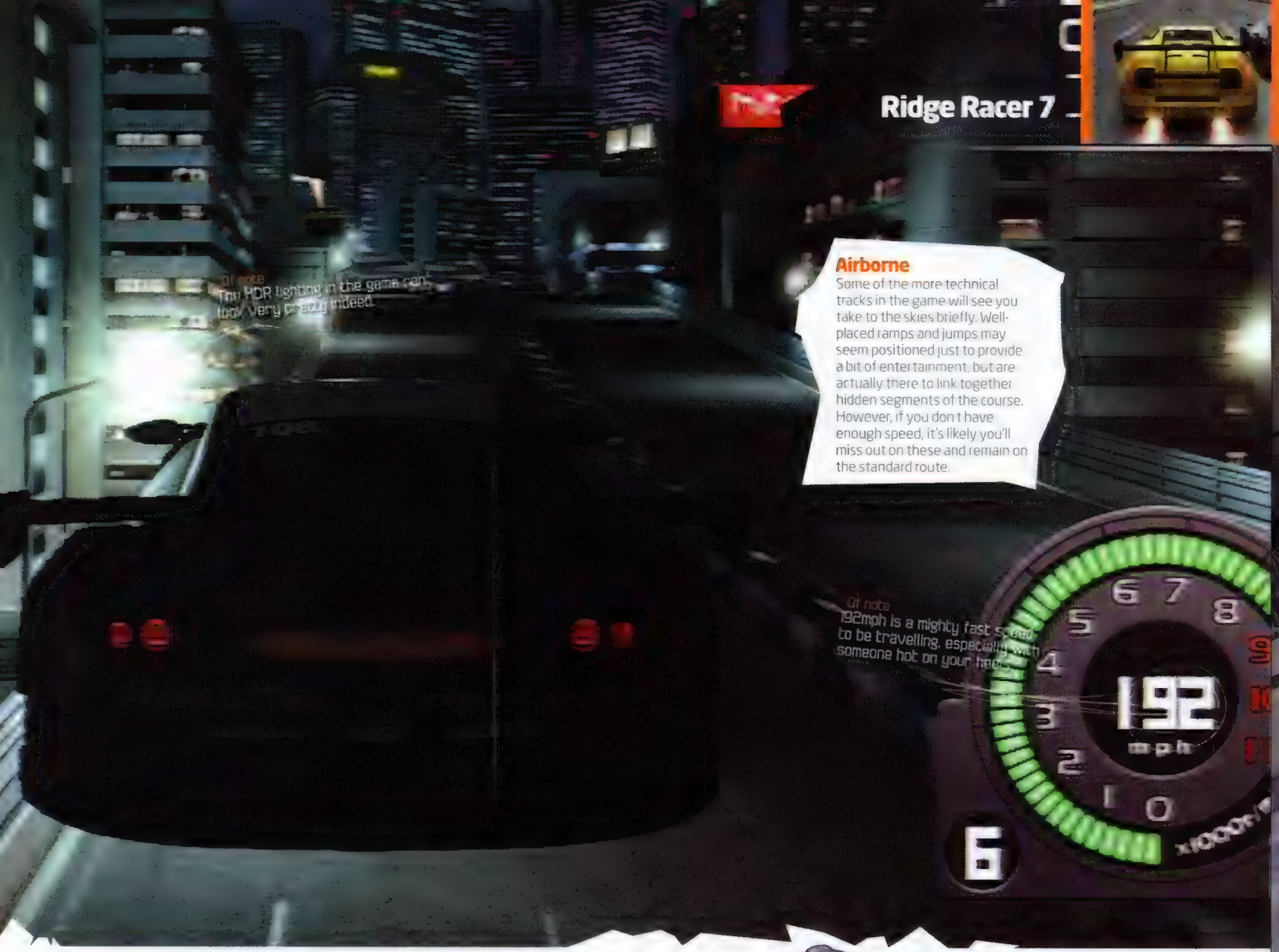
3 We're really pulling at straws now, but the online service is better than it has been in the past. There are a few nice online modes, including team racing and worldwide time-trial leaderboards, which do lengthen the game's lifespan.

CONTINUATION//
Type 4 back on the PSone. The Machine Connector, as it is known in the game, lets you fiddle and change numerous parts of your car. You can tune-up your engine, alter your tires and suspension, increase nitrous and upgrade your plug-in units. There's also the option to change the appearance of your machine, so expect to be adding spoilers, lowering your bodywork and adding fancy alloys. Namco claims there are over 300,000 different combinations, and although that may be a little excessive, those willing to put in the time are going to have a lot to get through. Even though each category is limited to what can actually be done – you won't get to modify to match specific specifications and can only upgrade parts to the next level – but what you do add to your car truly makes a significant difference when it's time to race. Some contests will be near-impossible unless you've made the right alterations to your ride, so you'll constantly be tweaking different components until you've established the perfect vehicle. It also offers a good incentive to keep perservering with the harder courses towards the end of the RSGP. Knowing that taking the chequered flag will allow you to advance your engine, which in turn will make the following races slightly easier, is a great addition and come *Ridge Racer 8* it would be nice to see this expanded upon even further.

Unfortunately, one of the problems that lies within the single-player mode is that it does have the tendency to become very tedious, especially when you're racing around the same group of tracks for the umpteenth time. With only 21 tracks in the game, it won't be long before the feeling of déjà vu sets in, You can race all the tracks in reverse, but that still doesn't change the fact that it all feels very repetitive in an extremely short space of time.

The lack of tracks is directly linked to what starts to bring *Ridge Racer* down. The majority of circuits present in this version were present in its predecessor, the Xbox 360-exclusive *RR6*. Although it has no real relevance to those who don't own a 360; however, it is useful to note that there's little point in playing through *Ridge Racer 7* if you've had a try with *RR6*. If you're truly desperate for a drifting fix then there's nothing else that currently compares, but know it's not an entirely new game.

As well as the courses being lifted from another previous version, the game also feels very rushed. In addition to that, the graphics are clearly not up to the standard expected


Of note
The HDR lighting in the game can look very pretty indeed.
Of note
192mph is a mighty fast speed to be travelling, especially with someone hot on your heels.
192
mph

Airborne

Some of the more technical tracks in the game will see you take to the skies briefly. Well-placed ramps and jumps may seem positioned just to provide a bit of entertainment, but are actually there to link together hidden segments of the course. However, if you don't have enough speed, it's likely you'll miss out on these and remain on the standard route.

on Sony's next-generation machine. One look at the exceptionally pretty *MotorStorm* is enough to validate this. Granted the two are very different beasts, Namco's racer is far more colourful in comparison to *MotorStorm*'s gritty and tough visuals, but so much more could have been done with this racer. To be fair, the backgrounds and environments do look nice; however, on closer inspection they appear jagged and emotionless. The vehicles themselves don't really stand up too well either, and at times it looks like the car has been stuck on over the rest of its surroundings and isn't even touching the road.

The textures are ropey and don't do the PS3 any favours; but despite the underwhelming graphics, *Ridge Racer* it still manages to look clean and sharp, as a high-definition game should do. Although it will never be the title to show your PS3 off to your friends, it is a great advertisement for how significant the jump from composite, to component to HDMI is. It's easy to be pessimistic when talking about resolutions and cables that improve the quality of your picture, but *RR7* is evidence that these are solid facts. It doesn't really hurt that it is capable of running in 1080p, but even in 720p the differences are noticeable. Backgrounds look clearer, cars look shinier and the overall attractiveness is definitely increased when running the PS3 through HDMI. It still looks good using component leads, so there's no need to rush to your local electronics store just yet, but when you do you will be pleasantly surprised with the upgrade.

Ridge Racer refuses to give up though, and tries to redeem itself somewhat by offering a solid, and at times, quite innovative online experience. There's the option to just pick a car, track and get on with the competition, but you'd be far better to invest some time with a real person, maybe buy them a gift or two and once they've decided

THE CONTROL SYSTEM

ABOUT THE CONTROL SYSTEM: *Ridge Racer 7* controls in the same way as any of the other titles in the series. You can set up the buttons to your own specifications, although it doesn't feel any different. However, there is the option to turn on the tilt control and take advantage of the Sixaxis remote, but it doesn't really benefit your experience. The tilt controls make the game unbearable to play, and the only reason to ever turn them on is so you can see just how bad they are

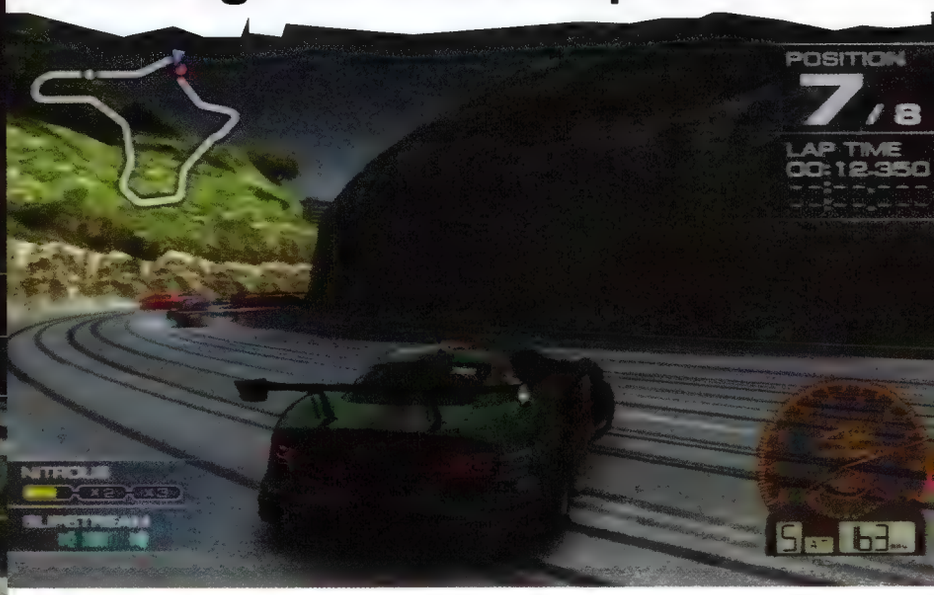
To enjoy the game, stick with the standard control setup

"Some of the more difficult tracks require a ridiculous amount of precision and technical ability; so despite its basic premise, there's actually a steep learning curve embedded into the game"

Look - you are going so fast that the car next to you is melting.

There are some pretty interesting cars and track segments, but they just don't hold up throughout.

"You can easily jump into an all-against-all race, but it's much more fun to take advantage of the team aspects"



CONTINUATION//

you're 'friend material', convince them to buy a PS3 and get online. Namco has included a few modes for you and your new-found buddy to enjoy. You can easily jump into an all-against-all race, but it's much more fun to take advantage of the team aspects in the game. Team battle is a run-of-the-mill contest with the slight difference that you and your team-mates scores are added together at the end. Pair battle is where a glimpse of genius rears its head for the first time. Players split into two teams of two and have to try and race side-by-side for the entire length of the course. If you manage to drift around the same corner together you'll obtain a bonus that makes your nitrous meter increase faster. Despite its obvious pros, it's let down by the fact you can't talk to your team-mate at any point during the race, so quite how you are supposed to come up with tactics or a strategy is a mystery. Even with a good selection of competitive online options, the time trial system may be what gives *RR7* true longevity.

In addition to the online modes there's also a two-player offline-racing option, but this really is quite throwaway. The feeling of speed and intensity is lost and it suffers from a notable drop in frame rate as well as the graphics taking quite a hit too. Neither of them are so bad that they completely ruin the experience, but it's not an aspect

HOW TO...

...Recover from a bad drift

Even with the three different types of drift in *Ridge Racer 7*, you're inevitably going to make some mistakes. Here's a step-by-step guide to show how events can go wrong and what to do to rectify it

1 As you're approaching the bend make sure your racing line is correct. Here, the car would have benefited from attacking the corner from a more acute angle.

2 Due to your machine being too far away from the curb, you now need to understeer to try and compensate. If you don't, it's likely the car will bash into the wall.

3 Panicking is never the option and usually results in overcompensating and oversteering instead. Your best bet is to apply the brakes as soon as possible.

4 If you don't, the car will continue to spin until you're facing the wall. There's now the risk of making your car turn 180 degrees until you're headed in the wrong direction.

5 As the car has now lost its grip, it's probably too late to hit the breaks. The best way to deal with this is to steer into the drift; this will try to level out the car.

6 Although it will take a short while to adjust, the car should slowly begin to move in the other direction and the feeling of ultimate power and control will start to return.

7 As your speed begins to decrease and you continue to steer into the drift, the car begins to regain its grip and stick to the road better, allowing you even more control.

8 Just as your car begins to get back on track, you need to slowly start to steer the other way until the majority of the car is facing in the right direction.

9 Begin to accelerate again and you should recover from the drift as well as possible. Remember though, if this happens you'll have to hit every other corner perfectly to have any chance of success.

SUMMARY: MAKE SURE BAD DRIFTS ARE A RARE OCCURRENCE; THEY'RE NOT EASY TO RECTIFY.

of the game that will have you foaming at the mouth for more.

Although Namco has clearly tried to add in numerous new additions to make *RR7* stand out by itself, it doesn't completely succeed well enough to cover the cracks that are clear for any serious gaming or *Ridge Racer* fan to see. Yes it's still a lot of fun to play, but after a while it's desperately obvious that the series needs a tweak or even a total overhaul. By offering a few more tracks it may have had a good chance of hiding its flaws, but even then it wouldn't have been long before another racing game inevitably overshadowed it. Some may find it wrong to judge a game based on its failure to grow, rather than look at its continuing success in producing an enjoyable racer. However, the PS3 is capable of so much more, and although it doesn't have to be used to its full potential at every hurdle, it does have to show itself taking significant steps forward.

If your only access to the *Ridge Racer* experience is on the Playstation 3, then by all means give it a try. Veterans of the series will embrace the similarities that it offers because this is what they've come to know and respect. New players will enjoy drifting round corners at death-defying speeds as it is always going to give you a few goosebumps. But unfortunately, each of these categories of people will eventually realise that it does seem rather rushed and soon notice the gaping holes that become apparent in its structure.

As it stands, we have a game that offers the same arcade-style racing that it has done for years, as well as a few new additions that keep it fresh enough to be worth at least some of your time.

Simon Miller

next3 verdict

OVERALL COMMENT

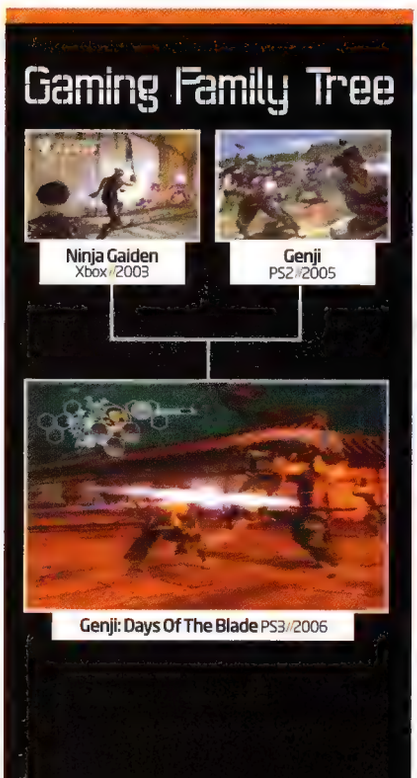
There's still a lot of fun that can be had with *Ridge Racer*, and there's a lot to be getting on with, but it's let down by its rushed nature and over familiarity; sorely needs an update.

06 OUT OF 10

IMPORT REVIEW
JAPANESE EDITION

GENJI: DAYS OF THE BLADE

So bad, it should carry a health warning



PS3 INFORM

Publisher Sony
Developer Game Republic
Release Date Out now
Price £Import
Players 1
Genre Adventure
Supports 720p, 1080i, Dolby Digital
Age Rating N/A
Website eu.playstation.com/ps3
Demo No

OPINION// If we were to sum up *Genji* in one word, that one word would almost certainly be 'amazing'; for were you ever to play the game, chances are you probably would be duly amazed – possibly even awestruck – by the game that Game Republic has managed to clobber together.

But before you go rushing off to the shops to pay whatever over-inflated price Mr. Import Shop Owner will be charging for the game, allow us to put that one word into context for you. See, while you will be amazed by the game, it won't be for anything the game has done right, but rather for the catalogue of errors that litter it from start to finish; indeed, the degree of flaws in the game are such that quite frankly, it's neigh-on impossible to play.

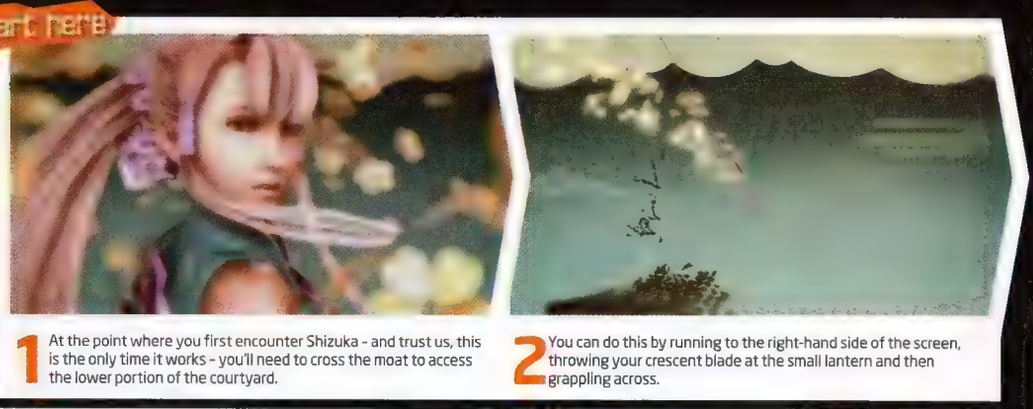
As such, the fact the opening movie is pretty much the only highlight of the game speaks volumes about just how painfully bad the game is. However, to its credit, watching the various in-game characters going through their routines as the glorious oriental-style artwork swirls around them is most certainly a thing of beauty. Although, once you get beyond this and the equally exquisite opening movie for the main game, the problems with the game quickly become apparent, offering the full spectrum of minor – indeed, occasionally, amusing – faults through to the sort of glaring flaws that leave you wondering just how the hell this was ever allowed to creep on to a store shelf in the first place.

For starters, there's the actual gameplay. Quite what possessed the developers to attempt shoehorning a high-paced action game into a game engine that relies upon static camera angles is beyond us, but there can be no doubt that this turns out to be every bit as horrendous to play as you'd imagine it to be. While it must be said that there is a mild sense of satisfaction in stringing together one repetitive slash or hit after another, the rarity of experiencing this is such that it's barely worth mentioning. Arguably, the main culprit is the use of

HOW TO...

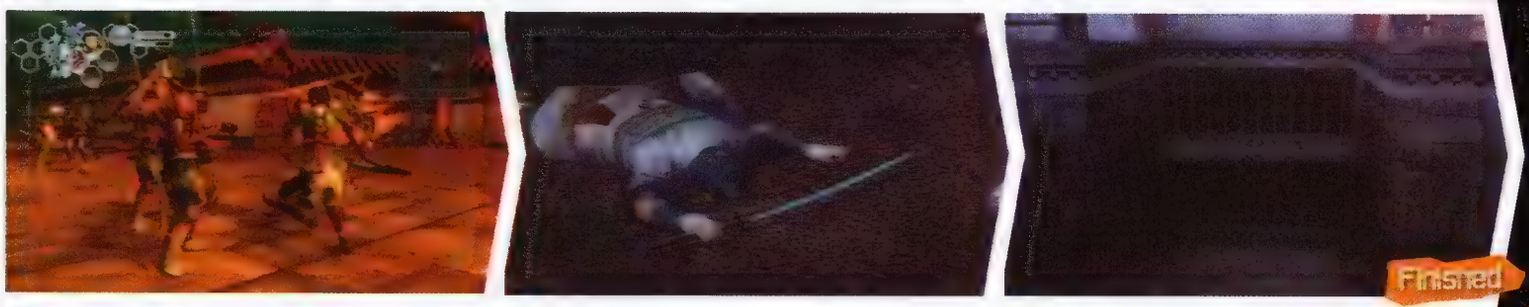
Find the all-important key

In this section, we are going to do what the game doesn't (at all) – explain how you can find the key to open the secret passage to get to the treasury. Don't worry, you can thank us later.



1 At the point where you first encounter Shizuka - and trust us, this is the only time it works - you'll need to cross the moat to access the lower portion of the courtyard.

2 You can do this by running to the right-hand side of the screen, throwing your crescent blade at the small lantern and then grappling across.



3 Once you're across, you then need to proceed to the bottom-end of the area, while killing all the enemies that you encounter along the way.

4 Enter the left-hand area where you will see a fallen soldier. In order to successfully obtain the key, you must go up to him and then press ⊗.

5 Sadly, you won't need the key until later (of course, nobody tells you this), at which point the soldier's body - and the key - is gone, forcing you to restart at that point and do it all again.

SUMMARY: UNFORTUNATELY, IT WASN'T THE ONLY TIME THIS HAPPENED IN THE GAME

THE CONTROL SYSTEM

At least the controls work! Shame about the rest of the game...

Profile

BENKI

the camera angles – without control over how you can view the action, it effectively leaves you vulnerable to attack from your blind sidebar, second-guessing where your opponents are by using the pathetic radar. But that's not to say there aren't other factors. While we'll grudgingly concede that the character animation is just about passable, the fact you have to wait for your character to finish their current action (the animation for which can be quite protracted), stand still and then perform an action such as blocking, promptly leaves you defenceless if your move doesn't come off successfully.

In addition to this, there are the controls. The downside to using static cameras is that when the action switches to another position, you're then forced to adjust your direction accordingly – hardly ideal when in the heat of battle. Indeed, in certain scenarios, the controls lose the plot completely; while the left analogue stick will normally adjust within a split second to a change of camera, the right analogue stick can occasionally require several seconds to follow suit; and even when it does catch up, those who have grown accustomed to controlling the camera with the right analogue stick will find it initially tricky to adjust to the fact it now controls the character's dodge attack.

On the plus side, the characters themselves are well designed (if a little clichéd) and boast a decent range of attacks. While it's equally affected by the need to wait for the character to finish a move before being able to use it, switching between characters is smooth – although quite frankly, quite why Game Republic deemed it necessary to only have one main character on screen at once when having an ally to cover you during the tougher encounters would have been a huge help is another

"How a game with such glaring problems was ever passed as fit for publishing is quite frankly, beyond us"

Profile

GROUP ACTION

One thing that does help are the numbers of enemies on screen. While the PS3 can do better, at least the enemy rate does keep the action flowing most of the time.

"On the plus side, the characters are well designed and boast a decent range of attacks"

nextGen

What defines this game as a 'Next-Gen' Playstation 3 title?

Graphic details

High-definition visuals are always a true sign of a next-gen game, and the fact the game can look very crisp and tidy when running on a high-def screen in 720p reaffirms the game's next-gen credentials.

CONTINUATION//

matter. But then to be perfectly blunt, it's scant compensation for the frustration of actually playing the game.

That said, this abysmal state of affairs is nothing compared to the levels. Rather than offering a free-flowing gaming landscape, *Genji* essentially consists of a series of rooms that, in conjunction with the associated flaws and faults found within them, you may have otherwise thougnt they would've been left behind in the last generation of consoles.

While there's no doubt that the levels look stunning in their detail, a number of minor flaws destroy any sense of immersion very quickly. For instance, even though your character and the environment may be bathed in the orangey glow of a raging f re, actually standing in the flames does no damage whatsoever. Likewise, those who think that seeking cover is a good way to escape the relentless rigours of battle will be surprised – not to mention annoyed – to find that while it's not possible for you to pass anything through a cast iron lantern or a boulder, enemy forces have no problems poking you with a spear or slashing away at you with a sword from the other side of the object. Fans of the humble invisible wall will be delighted to know that there's no lack of them in the game, with your team of athletic warriors seemingly capable of scaling solid walls with no problems, yet are somehow unable to clear a two foot high fence in order to get to an area which, if you walk ten virtual metres in the appropriate direction, you can access anyway.

Save and recovery points, while present, are poorly distributed around the levels, often failing to let you save at key points (such as just ahead of major battles); however, what really takes the biscuit is ineptitude with which the task-based gameplay is implemented.

In some instances, the game will tell you what to do, but due to the abysmal camera angles and dodgy clipping, often the only

The lighting effects are rather decent, with everything here a nice fiery orange.

Finding the soldier

Locating this chap is neigh-on impossible, because at the one time you do need him - to get the key off him - his lifeless corpse has long since vanished, forcing you to restart. On the plus side, you can get it off him now; on the downside, you have got to do it all again...

How it all goes wrong

Here you can see exactly what's wrong with the game. Firstly, there's the camera angle; see that chap on the right? Well, you probably wouldn't while playing until it's too late. Now your guy's been caught out, presumably because the enemy's hit him before he can block.

When the game does let you get a clear shot at the enemy, smashing them up is great.

way to fulfil the criteria set down by the game is to blindly attack objects (locating them is often a matter of guesswork) through solid object. More ominously, there are occasions where the game doesn't even tell you what to do. In one such incident, we found ourselves needing to locate a key to unlock a passage to a switch; not only did the game fail to so much as mention where this key was, when we did eventually find out – namely that we had to pick the pocket of a fallen solider in order to obtain it – it transpired that the said corpse had long since vanished, forcing us to revert to a previous save point in order to obtain the key and then replay a whole stretch of the game in order to progress. Suffice it to say, this wasn't the only such instance of this we found in the game, and it created a title that, without giving you these crucial parts of information at the corresponding times, is neigh-on impossible to complete without going through the arduous task of checking every last nook, cranny and dead soldier everywhere.

In addition to this, there are a wide number of smaller faults that are equally unfair – indeed cruel – in the way they rob the player of their energy. Objects randomly fall from the ceiling with no warning, given the player no chance of getting out of the way; likewise, enemies will randomly regenerate behind you, preventing you from falling back to conserve energy, and while you can kick whole wooden beams to one side by simply running into them, it's possible to get penned in behind such mundane objects as chests and chairs with no hope of escape.

Perhaps the most galling aspect of all is that we're even in a position to play it. While it must be said that most launch titles suffer from some degree of compromise in order to get them on the shelf as quickly as possible, quite how a game with such glaring problems was ever passed off as fit for publishing is, quite frankly, beyond us.

To say that we have been unimpressed by *Genji* would be a strong contender for understatement of the millennium. While there's no doubt that this game is steeped in Oriental charm, from the dodgy camera angles through the crap controls to the appalling level design, the sheer number of flaws, faults and shortcomings found in the game leaves a title that is, to all intents and purposes, broken; indeed, it would be no exaggeration to say that we would probably mark the game up had it refused to boot at all, thus sparing us the mental anguish of playing it – as such, very much one to be avoided and make no mistake.

Mark Podd

next3 verdict

OVERALL COMMENT

Trust us, irrespective of what you think you might be able to get out of the game, you really, really don't want to buy *Genji*. Really, you don't.

02 OUT OF 10

Profile

DESTRUCTION

When stuck on one of the many cryptic – and probably impossible due to some sort of fault – puzzles in the game smashing up furniture is a fun way to relieve stress before giving up

IMPORT REVIEW
US EDITION

PS3 INFORM

Publisher Activision
Developer Treyarch
Release Date March
Price £Import
Players 1 (2-24 online multiplayer)
Genre First-person shooter
Supports 720p, 1080i, Playstation Network, Dolby Digital
Age Rating N/A
Website callofduty.com
Demo No

WAR. Noun. An armed conflict between countries or groups that involves killing and destruction. Quick videogame translation: war is a bloody excuse for a good night out thanks to a destructive recipe of guns, grenades and tanks. That's all you need to know. No witty introduction that slowly segues into the main review and no painful "war, what is it good for" references. They're not needed. This is just war. Nothing more, nothing less.

Actually no, we lie, there's more to it than that. After all, what would a war be without politics? Kids fighting in the playground with sticks and stones, that's what. Behind the closed doors at Activision, the *Call Of Duty* baton has been passed from Infinity Ward to Treyarch. Given the mammoth success of *Call Of Duty 2*, this was a surprise to most observers but then war and politics do go hand-in-hand. Given the job of safeguarding one of the newer gaming series about, Treyarch has a lot to live up to. After all, if there's any series that has truly mastered the art of replicating the scale of war, it's *Call Of Duty*, largely thanks to Infinity Ward's efforts. Planes whistle overhead, ground troops scramble around like ants, errant grenades kick mud in the air, tank-shaped shadows lurk ominously on the horizon while shouting, screaming and swearing competing for volume. The gameplay itself is simple enough. You're a soldier fighting a war and you do so by running along a linear path, shooting enemies before they shoot you. To anyone who has ever picked up a pad before, it sounds painfully familiar. To all intents and purposes, this is FPS-meets-WWII fancy dress party as it doesn't do anything dramatically different to the million and one FPS games before it. However, those examining the gameplay mechanics are looking in the wrong place for this game's particular strengths. *Call Of Duty 3* isn't about fancy slowdown gimmicks, super jumping or stealth sections. *Call Of Duty 3* is all about the spectacle and the atmosphere. In short, it's all about the war and the guns, grenades and tanks.

It's about fighting with men fighting alongside you. Men who get killed by enemy gunfire, who throw grenades, who embark on brave runs into a cloud of smoke, who sometimes let the fight get the better of them and retreat. That's the real beauty of *Call Of Duty 3*. Rather than feeling like one man versus the world, it does genuinely feel like one nation versus another. It says a lot about your dependency for your fellow men too. Meaning, as soon as you find yourself in trouble, the first thing you do is check your radar to see where they are and

Profile
CORPORAL PEAS

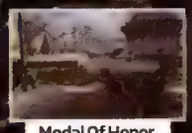
Call Of Duty 3

When duty calls, try not to run through a wall

Gaming Family Tree

Castle Wolfenstein PC//1983

Doom PC//1993



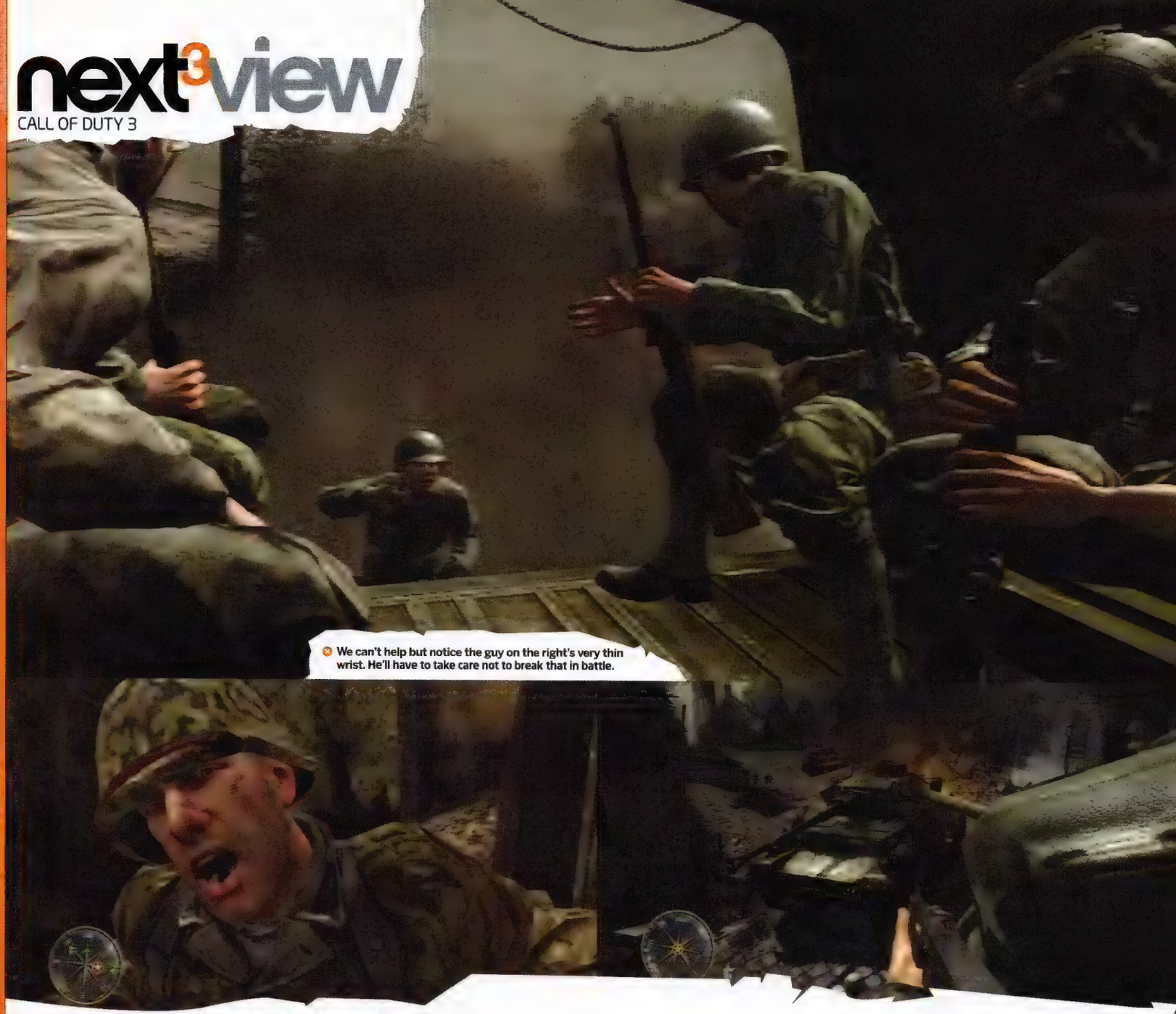
Medal Of Honor PlayStation//1999

Medal Of Honor: Frontline PlayStation 2//2002

Call Of Duty 2: Big Red One PS2 // 2005

Call Of Duty 2 Xbox 360 // 2005

Call Of Duty 3 PS3//2006



We can't help but notice the guy on the right's very thin wrist. He'll have to take care not to break that in battle.

See the scar on his cheek? "That's detail!" Treyarch would no doubt shout, waving its fat arms around to emphasis the point.

CONTINUATION //

therefore, which way to run with tears of shame streaming out of your eyes. Retreating into the midst on your own ensures safety and pushing up with your men alongside you instils confidence. You never feel like you're a lone Arnold Schwarzenegger behind enemy lines, trying to do everything by yourself. Rather, you're just one cog in a huge war machine, slowly rumbling onwards and crushing the enemy. Even when your men die, new men run in to fill their place and stand over the fallen bodies, continuing the assault. You're never short of fellow soldiers fighting alongside you and as a result, this means you're almost never short of action to get stuck into.

This also sets up some spectacular moments to savour. Not just the flaming planes soaring overhead or bodies flying in the air after a nearby bomb hits, but the grounded moments too. For example, your men storming a barnyard that has Axis hiding behind barrels, poking their heads out to take potshots, a machine gunner in one of the upper windows and enemy soldiers are trying to flank you. Clearing a house as your men charge up the stairs and you see them engage in firefights while you hang back, slightly scared, trying to convince yourself that you're being 'tactical'. Moving up through a mudfield in the pouring rain using a tank as cover, while Germans swarm all over your position. There are far too many of these moments to mention as nearly every one-on-one encounter soon spills out into a grander scene of action when reinforcements come in and a full-scale war breaks out. You feel as though Treyarch has wrapped the Playstation 3's meaty power lead around your neck and is dragging you kicking and screaming through its own personal war. There are some levels where you're not even given a chance to catch your breath – one early cut-scene starts fading to black then explodes back into life as a tank shell crashes into the wall next to you. A clever trick and it's one that keeps you on your toes, even during the quiet lulls.

Of course, this illusion of realistic war would be shattered if you could rocket-jump over the Nazis, no-scope them in the back, then corpse hump them while calling them 'n00bs'. Likewise, health packs spinning a few inches from the ground weren't exactly common back in 1939 and you don't find plasma rifles spawning in certain areas of the map, either. Everything here is kept authentic and realistic, to the point where the actual weapons are a little unwieldy too. When you scope your weapon, you don't get a narrowed crosshair as with Every FPS In The Universe... Ever! Instead, you look directly down the barrel of your gun and have to use the tiny bit of metal at the end as your aiming guide. Not 100 per cent reliable or accurate but hey, if that's what granddad had to put up with during the war, that's what you're going to have to put up with now. It makes *Call Of Duty 3* a close-up game because it's hard to hit anyone from a distance, even with bolt rifles such as the Lee Enfield. It completely dispenses with the usual sniper rifle abuse allowing you to hit those hiding

FIRST LEVEL TIMEWATCH

A lesson in preparing yourself for war. Listen carefully now

After the usual montage of war images, marching soldiers and booming cannons, you're introduced to *Call Of Duty 3*'s war via a training level. How odd! A training level with patronising instructions – in a videogame, of all places! Oh well, time to fight a war.

00:46 This excitable chap is Private Huxley. Like all Americans, he's far too shouty and overconfident. It's around this point that you 'discover' you can't shoot your own side.

01:00 Here you're given your first training - how to use a gun. This extends to pick up gun, point gun at enemy, shoot. Thanks for the helpful advice Private Huxley! No, really. Thanks.

01:30 He now forces us to shoot five helmets. Fair enough. It's here that you have to get used to the unique aiming system - looking down the barrel of your gun, with no crosshairs in place.

02:00 Now he demonstrates how to throw grenades. "Nice animation!" we think, knowing full well that thinking such thoughts aloud will see fellow humans shun us.

03:00 Your turn. You have to throw three grenades through the barn windows but it's much tougher than it first seems. It's a good time to practise cooking grenades though.

03:15 The smoke effects are really nice! Nice and volumetric and fluffy almost, and you can see your soldiers disappear as they charge through it. We'd give the smoke a hearty 8/10.

03:45 Your first practice with the melee attacks and jerking the pad. Surprisingly intuitive once you get the hang of it and it genuinely feels like a desperate last-minute move to save your life.

04:15 All that training done, all that learning complete and you're finally allowed to be let loose. Everyone piles on the coach, we assume it's for a school trip to the science museum.

04:20 Here's the teacher doing a head count. You'll enjoy some banter between soldiers, mainly talking about how wussy soldiers who aren't on the bus going to the science museum are.

04:30 *COD 3*'s insane love of background detail is apparent when you start moving, as tanks rumble past and soldiers run to their outposts. All the while, the soldiers are still talking...

04:45 It's at this point you notice the animation (again) because rather than recycling the same set animation over and over again, the soldiers are always doing something different.

05:00 Looks like someone missed the bus. Does he make it on? Does he trip and stumble, missing the bus for good? Or does something more sinister happen? You'll have to wait and see.

SUMMARY: IT'S NOT UP THERE WITH FRONTLINE'S TRIBUTE TO SAVING PRIVATE RYAN, BUT AS FAR AS INTRODUCTORY LEVELS GO, COD 3 OFFERS SOMETHING SPECIAL

in another postcode, let alone the German soldier hiding behind the tyres in front of you.

Health is dictated by... well, it's not actually dictated by anything. There's no health bar on the screen or set of numbers that slowly tick down to your death as you take bullets to your body. Rather, if you take damage, the screen turns red and you hear your character breathing heavily. That's when you know it's time to retreat and recover yourself. This takes a few seconds and when you're back to normal, you can head back into action. It's not exactly what we'd call realistic but it feels a hell of a lot more organic than scrabbling around for medikits. In any case, cranking the difficulty up to Veteran means you can take about two shots before you collapse to the ground in a bloody mess, so there's your realism if you really want it. Mission Failed! Have a war quote to make you feel better about your (lack of) gaming ability. Thanks Activision!

The game is made harder by the fact that you can only carry two weapons. This is war so you don't get to fill your pockets with rocket launchers, nail guns and proximity mines. The two-weapon choice not quite as strategic as it may sound as what these choices often boil down to is taking one long-range gun for sniping and one general purpose spray-'n'-prey weapon. Yet for those getting further on in the game and those who cranked the difficulty up in the beginning, this two-weapon management quickly becomes a crucial skill. Ammo is the main reason. When you run out of ammo, you're a sitting duck and forced into an ungainly scramble for a fallen comrade or an enemy's gun. Mastering all weapons gets your complacent arse out of trouble, a simple bit of planning does wonders in keeping you out of trouble to begin with. So what's it to be? The sniping abilities of the slow-firing and useless-at-close-range Kar98? Or how about the wanton carnage of the BAR? What initially seems like a trite addition to keep the realism in place actually adds another layer to the shooting, as you find yourself ensuring you've got plenty of firepower to fall back on should the worst come to the worst.

"It's not like you fought through level three to face off against Robo-Hitler"

The simplistic FPS formula worked well in *Call Of Duty 2*, simply because it added to the overall authenticity. It's not like you fought through level three to face off against Robo-Hitler, who taunts you in a cut-scene, reveals he killed your mother at the start of the game, then runs around the end-of-level room lobbing grenades at you. So given the limited framework it's dealing with, Treyarch has tried to build on that by spicing things up with new additions and tweaks. Predictably enough, the results are mixed. Cooking grenades is one example. As cool as it sounds frying a grenade with some onions and thyme, cooking

Profile

PRIVATE MANDELBAUM

Smoke grenades

Smoke grenades are like Get Out Of Jail Free cards, allowing you to bypass certain areas without too much difficulty. The problem comes when enemy soldiers charge you through the smoke anyway and the obscured vision means you don't spot them until the last possible moment...

nextGen

What defines this game as a 'Next-Gen' Playstation 3 title?

With war on the PS3 – size matters

1 The sense of scale is something that can only be achieved on this next generation of hardware with masses of soldiers shooting, screaming and scrambling for their lives while background explosions flare up and buildings crumble.

Whatever Nintendo can do Wii can do better... or at least just as good

2 The Sixaxis controller comes into play with certain events, such as the much-maligned melee encounters that see you shaking the pad to get rid of the soldiers breathing down your neck.

Broken dreams, broken bodies and at times broken game

3 Maybe it was over-ambition, maybe it was the result of a short development time but either way, Treyarch didn't have time to iron out all the bugs and glitches in *Call Of Duty 3*. We're hoping it's just a one-off...

CONTINUATION //

grenades is the name given to the art of holding onto a grenade for as long as possible before throwing it. It's a cute addition; however, it doesn't really add anything new as in the hustle and bustle of the shooting, you tend to favour the press-button-throw-grenade-get-the-hell-out-of-Dodge approach. So why bother then?

The answer is cooking grenades is an obvious counter to the new ability to return grenades. Previously in *Call Of Duty 2*, grenades were indicated by a small flashing icon and an arrow that left you to hightail it in the opposite direction with your fingers crossed, hoping you were quick enough and get to keep your legs in about three seconds time. In *Call Of Duty 3*, however, you can head over to the grenade, pick it up and throw it back. It's an incredibly risky move and because of the risk involved... well, the running option will almost always be the one you favour. It's not cowardice, of course... oh no. It's merely strategising. Even so, returning grenades does create the potential for some dramatic escape-from-death scenarios. If you pull it off, then you feel like a god-damn hero. If you screw it up, then all you can do is hope that no one was watching. Like workmen who blame their tools, we like to tap the pad following our death and examine it quizzically, as though the Sixaxis was somehow to blame for our grenade-returning shambles.

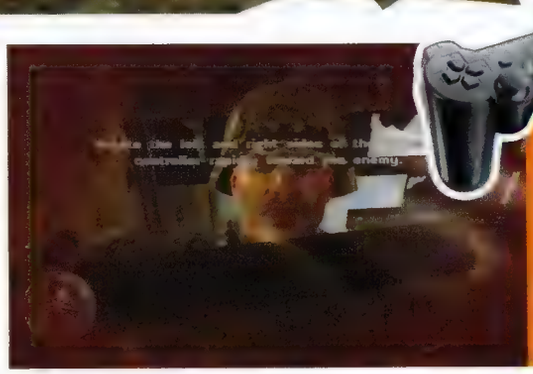
The tweaks to the grenade system aren't huge overhauls but work well enough and for newcomers, it simply makes learning how to use grenades more fun. That's the easy part. Now the tricky part – talking about the melee sections without wanting to eat our hands in disgust. Every now and then, you'll bump into these scripted events where you'll do battle with an enemy soldier from close range. By do battle, we mean quickly spinning the pad left and right before pressing one of the face buttons. Then doing it again. Then doing it again. And so it continues until you reach the enemy's scripted death animation, the game resumes and you wonder what the hell just happened. It's supposedly there to add to the tension but actually takes away, as you're safe in the knowledge that manically thrusting the pad around will see you through safely. Compared to the tight, taut atmosphere of the main game as you creep through buildings trying to spot enemies before they spot you, these forced encounters are dismal failures. Does thrashing around like a dying fish make you feel more involved? No, it makes you feel somewhat self-conscious and puzzled as to the point.

Last on the checklist – and definitely least – are the driving sections. Oh dear Lord, the driving sections. It's the usual shambles you

Gun turrets
There's a technique to storming gun turrets and the like. Throw a cooked grenade, charge forward, then quickly charge back and wait for the men who sheepishly charged in with you to do the work. Then clean up the mess and claim the victory as yours. Easy!

expect from a videogame that tries to tack on driving sections to a game that doesn't need them. Shoddy handling, impromptu ramps conveniently made of planks of wood lying around and a general "what's the point?" feeling dampening your spirits. Even as your passengers fire at the nearby Germans and scream at you to avoid the tanks in your way, the attempts to inject excitement into these dead sections fail dismally. They're not nearly frequent enough to knock *Call Of Duty 3* off the rails but they do crop up just enough to get you thinking of the penultimate letter of the alphabet. Later on, you get to rampage through the beautiful French countryside in tanks, shooting at Germans and farm peasants, which is a whole lot more fun. Unfortunately though, not even that can wipe away the memory of just how shockingly bad the driving sections are.

In the weirdest of ironies, by attempting to add to the formula Treyarch has actually taken something away – the tension. *Call Of Duty 3* is at its best when you're on foot and fighting it out on ground level for space, trying to push your men up and towards your objective. It's definitely not at its best when you're bombing around in a jeep, catching 'mad air' and trying to pretend the driving sections aren't really happening. If wonky driving sections were all *Call Of Duty 3* had to answer for, it would easily walk out of Next3's examination hall with a grade A, waggling its fingers at the other dismal students as it left (*NBA 07*, we mean you). Unfortunately, that's not the case.



THE CONTROL SYSTEM

Uses the Sixaxis with moderation and intelligence. We like this. A lot.

For every collapsing building, soaring violin orchestra and massive explosion that helps build up the seamless illusion of a real war going on around you in *Call Of Duty 3*, a different kind of anarchy is descending on you elsewhere. It's one you only really spot when you slow down against Treyarch's will and closely examine the chaotic war carousel. Yes, good old cracks, blemishes, glitches and general ugliness. The general stench of rushed development creeps into your nostrils.

"If there's any series that has truly mastered the art of replicating the scale of war, it's Call Of Duty. Planes whistle overhead, ground troops scramble around like ants and errant grenades kick mud in the air"

Profile

PFC GUZZO

We're not sure what PFC stands for but we'll presume it's invincible given he's one of the infamous characters in *Call Of Duty 3* who simply does not die, no matter what punishment he's taken

"Call Of Duty 3 is at its best when you're on foot and fighting it out on ground level for space, pushing towards your objective"

Learning how to use each weapon and accounting for its sights and recoil is a major factor in learning how to play *Call Of Duty 3*.

CONTINUATION //

First culprit is the artificial intelligence. In the thick of battle, you tend not to notice anything wrong in the chaos and erratic behaviour can be forgiven by the fact that hundreds of German soldiers are shooting in your general direction. It's when the smoke clears and you see fellow soldiers running on the spot, glitching through walls and shooting at the ceiling that you raise your eyebrows and wonder what's going on. Rare glitch? Not so, as you'll have already noticed multiple glitches by the second level. Rushed development? Perhaps as this is the sort of thing that could easily have been ironed out with a few months more studio time and care. Either way, it doesn't matter. The fact remains that your team-mate is shooting and screaming at a ceiling light while you're standing around and scratching your head like a monkey.

At the other end of the scale, presumably to balance out this problem with another new one, are soldiers who don't die. Admittedly, this doesn't seem like a great problem but if there's anything that instantly shatters the illusion of reality Treyarch effortlessly weaves elsewhere, it's watching the likes of Isabelle Dufontaine take multiple tank shells to the face with little more than a feminine "oof" before dusting herself and carrying on. A woman to be admired, for sure, but utterly ridiculous in the context of a war based on human vulnerability and frailty. The reason she survives is that she has to have a key conversation later on with French spy Marcel as dictated by the storyline, so no matter how many grenades explode in her face, bullets land in her back or rifle-butts crack in her forehead, she carries on. The same applies to other characters who are later required to open doors, set explosives or have key conversations. They're all immortal, so the storyline can continue on as scripted. *Call Of Duty 2* suffered from the same problem but for one reason or another, it's much more obvious in this sequel.

Which leads us onto the next problem, doors that don't open. If you rush ahead of your troops and clear all your objectives, you have to wait for everyone to regroup in the right area to trigger the soldier who steps forward, kicks the door down and allows

HOW TO...

...storm a French house

With Nazis holed up in a grand house in a French village, how are you going to drive them? It'll take more than playing loud music for months on end, put it that way.

1 Charging the house like a particularly stupid bull in a particularly dangerous China shop sees this happen. Retreat, take cover and plan your approach carefully.

2 It's dark but there's plenty of cover that allows you to approach the house. Most of it breaks under heavy firepower, so keep on the move and keep your head down.

3 Smoke grenades! The AI is programmed so the firing dies down when smoke is on screen owing to the fact that you can't be seen, so use this to your advantage and rush under the cover of smoke.

4 Alternatively, hang back and wait for the Germans to panic and run through the smoke to find you. Either way, the smoke is definitely the safest way to advance your position.

5 Germans also flank the house, so use grenades to flush them out. You have the option of storming through the house but it's safer to approach from around the sides with grenades...

6 Explosive barrels! God love 'em. Once you reach the barn at the back of the house, you might have run out of grenades, so rely on the barrels to force your way through.

7 Success! Everyone is dead, so pillage the German weapons and do a victory dance. God Bless America, God Save The Queen and God Knows What The Polish Anthem Is.

8 Oh no. Oh bloody no. It's a driving section. They're every bit as bad as you feared. Use the Sixaxis to steer or lift it up to your face and try to use it to hide your shame.

9 Oh God, it never ends. The escape to victory is more like a haphazard stagger to failure as the roaring success of the house assault ends in this glorified obstacle course. For shame.

SUMMARY: AND THAT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, IS HOW TO DO IT

progress. Again, it doesn't sound so bad but there's almost no effort made to disguise this piecemeal approach to working your way through a level so you're often sitting around, waiting for the game to catch up with you. When it does finally get to where you are, wheezing and leaning on your shoulder while it catches its breath, you can almost hear the lines of code underneath the glossy war shout "brilliant, you've reached point A, now quickly run to point B!". No sooner do your soldiers complete one objective, they all charge off in another direction at exactly the same time, leaving you to play catch-up. It doesn't look natural and it doesn't look right.

Without wanting to descend into a catalogue of errors, these oversights plague *Call Of Duty 3*. Individually, they're little more than cynical nit-picking. When these faults are combined, they have a sledgehammer-effect on the atmosphere and serve to undermine the hard work elsewhere. By the time the lengthy campaign draws to a close, *Call Of Duty 3* is limping over the finish line rather than confidently sprinting. It's a real shame because there's a fantastic FPS aching to burst out and show what its capable of; however, around every corner you'll run into some kind of glitch. *Call Of Duty 3* still manages to put its case across as a fantastic shooter with brilliant set pieces that stay in your mind long after the end credits have faded to black. Even so, it's hard to shake the feeling that the happiest people won't be New Playstation 3 Owner™ who's bursting to see what his new sleek black baby can do but a couple of developers over at Infinity Ward, who will high-five each other in glee then run down to the beach to play some volleyball. *Call Of Duty 3* is a strong FPS but it carries an unmistakable whiff of disappointment with it.

Ryan King

next3 verdict

OVERALL COMMENT

A flawed gem, entertaining and packed with dollops of atmosphere but some sloppiness leaves it a little too rough around the edges to truly stand out from the crowd.

07 OUT OF 10

IMPORT REVIEW
US EDITION

NEED FOR SPEED CARBON

Not quite the copy we were expecting

PS3 INFORM

Publisher Electronic Arts
Developer In-house
Release Date Out now
Price £Import
Players 1-2 (2-8 online)
Genre Racing
Supports 720p, 1080i, Dolby Digital, Playstation Network
Age Rating 10+
Website www.nfs.ea.com
Demo No

OPINION// It's actually very easy to take a dislike to popularity. If something is fortunate enough to have mass appeal, then there's a fair chance that those who consider themselves 'in the know' will shun just to show that their feelings and views are somehow more learned. It's especially relevant when it comes to the videogames industry. Each year when Christmas rolls around, there's a fair chance you'll see a *Need For Speed* title at the top of the charts. Whether this will be the case this year we don't know yet, but history has proven that it's only really the mighty *GTA* franchise that can knock it from the Xmas pedestal. So for this reason – the reason of popularity – the series seems to be frowned upon. This is actually very unjust. *NFS* games have provided a solid racing experience with each instalment, and for all the customisation and trendy soundtracks that have been put in place to bait the casual gamer, there have been very few real reasons to knock the games. It's upsetting to hear for some, we know, but it's the truth.

In this way, *Need For Speed Carbon* is similar to its forerunners. When it does hit the shelves, many will make a purchase based on the copious level of TV/phone box/side of bus advertising and be very happy with what the package contains – largely because *Carbon* is a very good game.

What we have here is EA being a little lazy in the best possible way. *Carbon* is available on just about everything. Last-generation machines are struggling with it, the Xbox 360 and Wii versions are already here, and there's a fair chance someone's mobile phone is making a joke of it because '5' simply doesn't work as an accelerator. With the game being ported and overhauled so much, it's actually easy to dismiss the title as simple console fodder (another solid reason for the casual connection), but this too is a little unfair due to the surprising quality of the title.

Okay, so at the core we're looking at a mediocre racing title here, but over the years the *Need For Speed* formula has been tweaked enough to actually divert attention

WINGMAN
They may not be pretty, but your 'crew' can help out in almost any racing situation – as long as you keep their cars in good working order as well as your own, that is.

Of note:
You rarely have time to look at this either.

READY, STEADY...
As you would expect, the beginning of each race is full of everyone trying to ram their way to the front. Hilarious, really, as it never seems to make any difference in arcade racers...

Of note:
You never have time to look at this. Ever.

You soon find that spending all your cash on looks means you lose every race you enter. We found out the hard way...

THE CONTROL SYSTEM

ABOUT THE CONTROL SYSTEM: Although it may seem a little bit shaky at first and many walls that are easily missable can be clipped in error; the overall the steering is great for arcade racing. However, as with any game of this type, one of the most important elements of the controls is to put in some time to practice your moves before you play with the

The controls are fine, once you remember to dismiss realism

Profile
GOOD GIRL

away from the fact that the racing itself is only just above average. In the beginning, there was the 'pimping' element to satisfy those that were persuaded by various loud Americans on televis on to customise, then came the open world; the Heat levels that determined to what level the police pursued you – now we have territories and crews. It's as if EA are taking a stab at the ever-popular *GTA*/gangs/respect formula. Actually, there's no 'as if' at all, it's fairly blatant.

However, for all the desperation that this latest tweak seems to reveal, it has to be said that these new elements are far from patched on. It's clear that time and energy has gone into these features and that they have always been focused on by the EA team charged with the task of developing.

By competing in the various race/drag/drift competitions (all of which you'll recognise from the last few *Need For Speed* titles) scattered throughout each territory, your respect will grow and you'll become more notorious in that area, and more hated by the gang leader who owns the territory. Eventually he'll challenge you to a one-on-one race out in the canyons where you normally lose unless you've done plenty of free roaming and upgrading of your vehicle. The free roaming is a great touch that rewards those with a taste for exploration, but doesn't punish players who make use of the 'skip straight to event' feature that you constantly have access to. New vehicles, more

next3view

NEED FOR SPEED CARBON

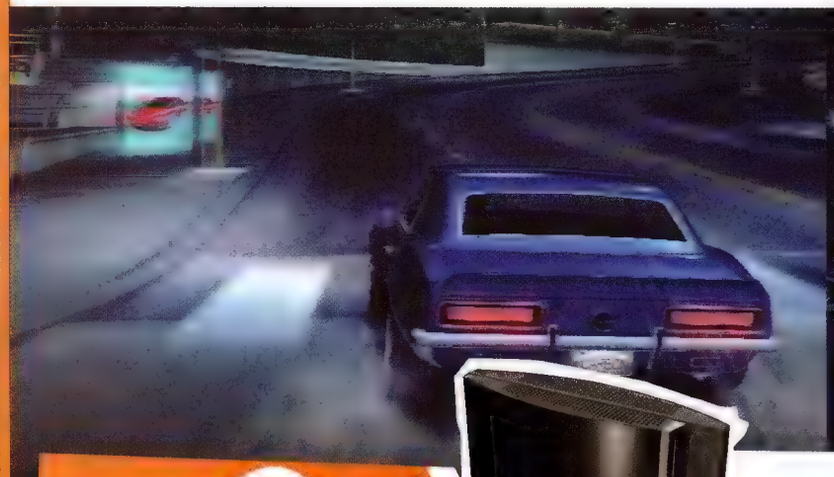
Early third party PS3 games are clealy a bit rushed. *Carbon* is no exception.

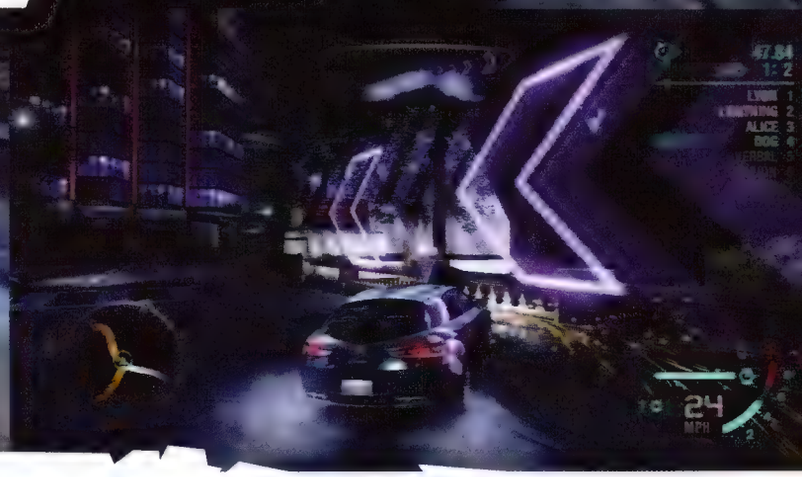
Profile

STORY TIME

Although it's wrong for any racing game to try and have a story, the one forced awkwardly into *Carbon* isn't half bad. Maybe it's just all the handsome faces that appeal to us

"What we have here is EA being a little lazy in the best possible way"





nextGen

What defines this game as a 'Next-Gen' PlayStation 3 title?

It's just the same

As *Need For Speed Carbon* has actually appeared on 'old-gen' machines there are very few ways to prove that this is a next-generation game. The Playstation 3 disc refuses to play on a PS2 or Xbox, though.

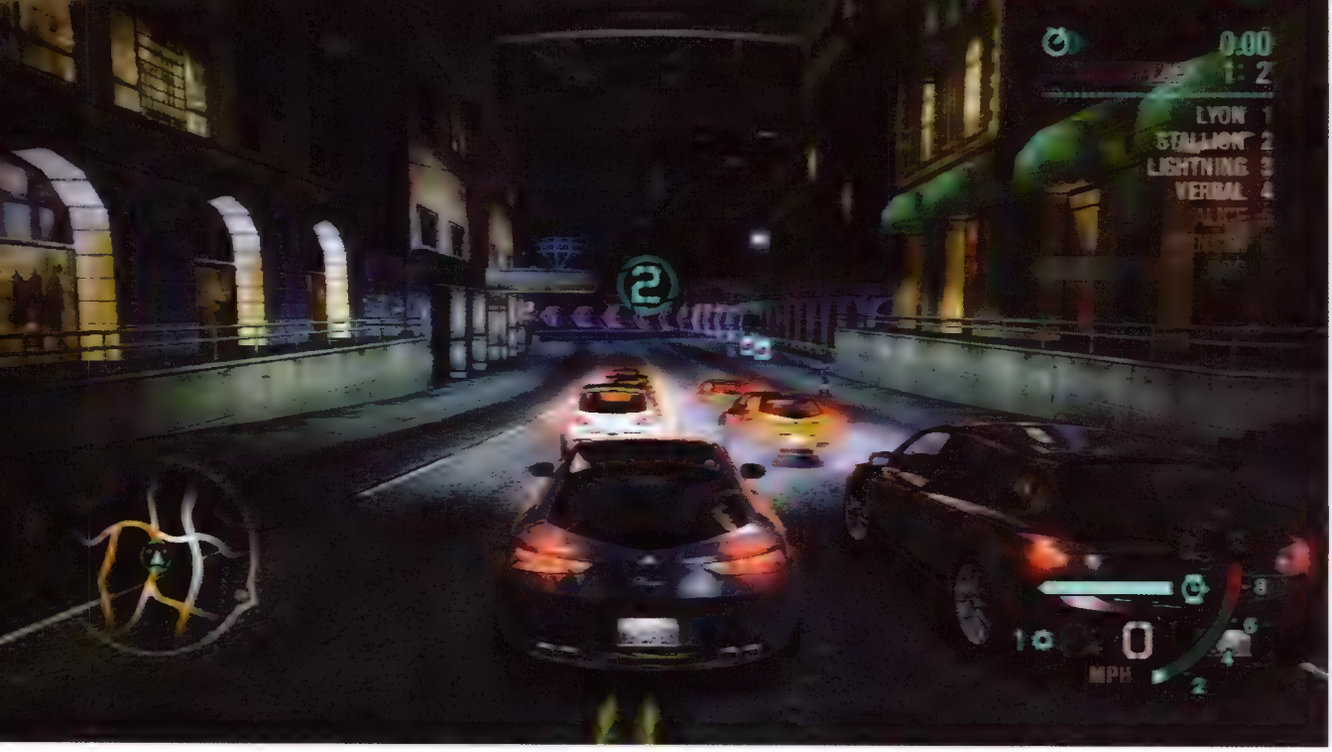
CONTINUATION//

cash and impromptu street races are all available if you care to let go of the game's hand for a while and look around.

It'll also come as no surprise that the cop aspect from *Most Wanted* has also managed to stay. It's a good thing too as it's a great feature. Being pursued by the fuzz is even better implemented than it was before, and the process of escaping from their view and finding a nice safe spot to giggle in has become a very tense experience. Also, their inclusion in the races themselves (they always seem to turn up in the last lap of any important race) makes for a grand challenge. We like indeed.

Of course, the other element that really determines whether you cross the finish line in first or second is something we mentioned earlier; the wingmen. They are the most important new addition and there are three types of wingmen in the game. Once you collect them up, you can choose who you take into a race with you. Blockers are your muscle and will barge selected opponents once their bar is adequately green, Drafters will drive ahead allowing you to slipstream and build speed, while Scouts will shoot off ahead and reveal any hidden shortcuts to your strained eyes. This is probably the main downside of the game – the visuals. Although not overly bad, the graphics on offer are simply not what you'd expect from a Playstation 3. We've seen some dazzling efforts emerging recently and *Need For Speed Carbon* can't really compete. Perhaps this is just one of those things that come with multiformat games, or maybe the general darkness of the entire game doesn't help really matters, but it's certainly a little underwhelming. Still, with a road to attempt to fix your eyes to, there's very little time to do much looking around anyway.

The FMV, however, is a different story completely. Despite using real actors, the visual style chosen makes them look very computer generated and the overall effect is pretty impressive. The acting may indeed be



Profile

SHORT CUTS

Your Scout wingmen are by far the most useful of your 'crew' as they

FIRST LEVEL TIMEWATCH

A racing game with a story. Could it be termed a 'CarPG'?

Thanks to a flashback, you find out that you managed to stitch up all your friends a few years ago when the cops raided a race and you were the only one who escaped the law. Now you're back in town with a bounty on your head, oh, and you have to escape the clutches of a racer who wants the cash you're worth...

0:25 A pretty girl is telling you to 'drive carefully'. It's safe to say that nobody on the team will ever drive badly now just because she's told us not to.

0:00 Escaping from your 'hunter' doesn't seem that difficult until a lorry gets in your way. There's no point in even trying to avoid it - you won't be able to.

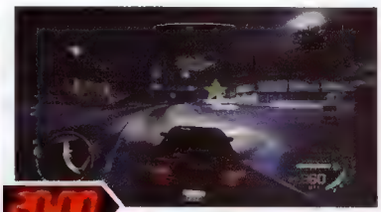
13:00 Your old friends have given you a harsh telling off and now everything is okay again. As long as you represent their 'crew', that is.

17:00 You have been allowed to pick your vehicle and have partaken in a test drive. We opt for the sporty-looking 'tuner' choice.

0:00 With your car chosen it's time to learn the game's unique feature - how to use your wingmen. Some annoying fat guy helps out. He has a silly laugh.

13:00 You soon find that the three different wingman traits work really well. This is undoubtedly the biggest surprise the game has to offer.

17:00 Now the police are on you and you need to escape from them - race quickly and everything goes according to the plan that you didn't have.



20:00 It's now a pleasant drive back to the safehouse to meet up with your only wingman. Don't worry - more will come with time, no doubt.

SUMMARY: NOT A BAD BEGINNING, BUT THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT TRYING TO GIVE A RACING GAME A PLOT THAT MAKES US FEEL A LITTLE GRUBBY.

as cheesy as hell, and most of the cast really do seem to asking for a slap each time they open their annoyingly posing mouths, but if a story must be put into a racing game then this is a reasonably good way of doing it.

The other niggle is the actual length of the game. Both the *Underground* games took roughly 40 hours to conquer in their entirety and *Most Wanted* wasn't that much shorter; however, *Carbon* is shorter still. A persistent player who has little interest in roaming the city will probably have their own crew symbol stamped over the territories and will have won everything in that time. But then that's the deal with most open-world titles; if you want to race through without seeing everything the game has to offer, then it's a definite possibility.

So overall EA has done a grand job. What could have easily turned into a mess of gangs and swearing has come out with a sleek finish that manages to impress us more than any of the previous *NFS* titles. And, dare we say, it may even deserve to wade all the way to the top of the charts. Maybe only for one week, though.

Rick Porter

next3 verdict

OVERALL COMMENT

It's always good to see a well-worn franchise receive the attention and the credit it deserves and *Need For Speed Carbon* delivers everything that you would expect.

08 OUT OF 10

78 mph is faster than even a cheetah. Our car actually goes far faster than this as well. We must be great.

IMPORT REVIEW
US edition

TONY HAWK'S PROJECT 8

The birdman tries flying with a broken wing

INFORM

Publisher Activision
Developer Neversoft
Release Date Out now
Price £Import
Players 1-2
Genre Sports
Supports 1080i, 720p, Dolby Digital
Age Rating N/A
Website www.tonyhawksproject8.com
Demo No

THUS far in Neversoft's career as one of the most successful developers around, it hasn't really come up against any kind of true test. The marketing budget of publisher pals Activision is large enough to see any title produced by the Californian extreme sports gang slip into the charts like a buttered ferret down a waterslide. Even its rather limp departure from the world of *Hawk's*, namely *Gun*, managed to do considerably better than perhaps it should have done. Yes, it's in such cases that the supremacy of advertising and PR over quality can be best, and most disappointingly, seen. We have to say that this is something we almost completely forgot when approaching the latest from the loins of Neversoft. Looking back at the oppressive weight of hype surrounding the game before its release, we have to say that we may have been taken in a little easier than perhaps hardened games journalists should. In essence, we're disappointed with Tony's first outing on the PS3, and while that knowledge may make these eight pages a little less rousing than they could be, it's important to know that with *Project 8* you're not seeing the PS3 in its best light.

Going back to that long-term marriage of Neversoft and Activision, it's one that has made Tony Hawk one of the biggest names in skating, having found his way, at some point or another, into most console-owning households. This is no bad thing, and we're not berating Activision for doing its job properly, but the formula seems a little stale, you'd have to admit, and no amount of new tricks is likely to help reinvent the franchise. What *Tony Hawk's* needs is the retention of the superb control system – that's a must – but also things need a shake-up. Neversoft should move away from the over-reliance on names and stop looking back to the high points in the series for inspiration. We all know how exciting and enjoyable the series has been in the past, but that's exactly it. The past. It's over. Gone. Dead. Departed. Past. The knowledge that you're simply playing an amalgam of previous titles with *Project 8* comes as something of an annoyance.

However, we have started on the wrong foot here and it needs to be said that *Tony Hawk's Project 8* is a fun game, fair and square. The feeling of landing a huge combo is fantastic, and it still lends itself well to sustained, continuous and lengthy play. Indeed, while playing here in our too-well-lit offices, the thought occurred to us that the experience would be significantly improved by doffing our trousers, turning off the lights and playing cross-legged in our slightly yellowing, but supremely comfortable, underwear as the

Profile
JASON LEE
Star of *My Name is*

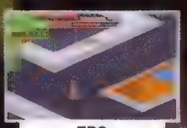
gives you plenty throughout the game on where to find the He looks nothing like the real thing, though

"Neversoft needs to move away from the over-reliance on names and stop looking back to the high points in the series for inspiration"

Gaming Family Tree

Skate or Die
Amiga// 1987

THPS
PS2 2001



720
Amiga// 1987

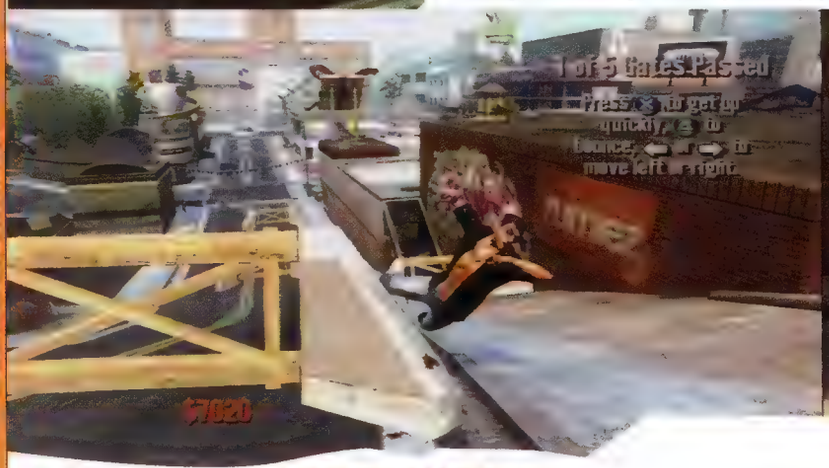
SSX
PS2// 2000

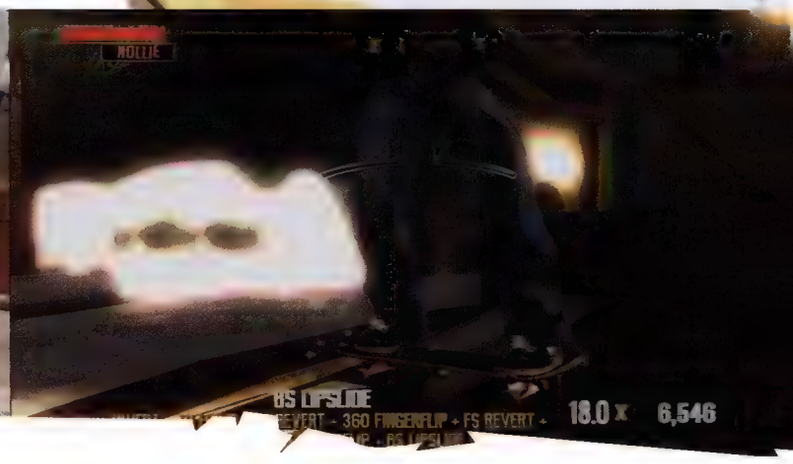
THUG 2 PS2 2004

THAW PS2// 2005

Tony Hawk's Project 8 PS3// 2006

Playing entirely with the tilt control is nearly impossible although a mix of analogue and tilt is just about playable.





If you're expecting an entirely reworked *Tony Hawk's* then you'll be sorely disappointed.

CONTINUATION //

anaemic glow of our HDTV barely illuminates our Pringle-crumb encrusted bodies. It's still twitch gaming at its very best. It continues to demand the thought and dexterity required of the world's best surgeons, just at a pace that makes the eyes water. From our point of view, as die-hard *Hawk's* fans, there are plenty of great moments to be had as you trawl the city, opening up sections with your sick skills.

Tony's come to the town of Podunk you see, having heard it's a hotbed of skating activity, he has brought along all his mates to form 'Project 8' – a team of the top eight skaters. Yeah, it's a complete pile of balls; however, thankfully it doesn't interfere in the same way as *American Wasteland*'s banal joke of a storyline did. Indeed, something that did come as a bit of a surprise to us was that the entire game hasn't been steeped in the kind of 'gnarly' humour of many recent attempts in the *Hawk's* series. The exception, and we were fully prepared for this, comes from the appearance of Jason Lee – star of *My Name Is Earl* – who can skate like a bit of a demon. While he may be able to skate, his shoddy representation in the game, combined with the regularity in which he appears, serves as a point of annoyance throughout.

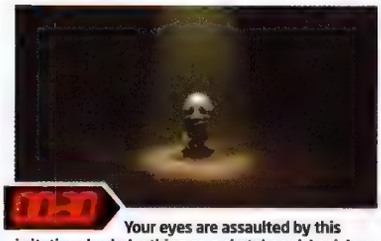
This is where one of our major gripes comes in. We've loved the series since the original, we'll happily admit it, but what we've seen in the last few excursions is a tendency to sway toward the *Jackass* lifestyle in a fashion which seems merely juvenile, rather than wretchedly funny *and* juvenile. Listen to any of the skater's inane ramblings. Not only will you be hard pushed to find any semblance of meaning in it, but you'll get the distinct and slightly irksome impression that this isn't how they speak in real life, and are putting it on a little. It begs the question 'why?', though. As this does nothing to add to the appeal and if anything takes away from the feel overriding 'by skaters, for skaters' feel that it does so well. However, we would happily concede that *Project 8* does better in the implementation of the culture than anything from *T.H.U.G.* onwards, and the slightly calmer feel is much to its benefit. The worst thing is just how false it can be at points, more specifically the cut-scenes, and we'd be being unnecessarily generous if we used the term 'character likenesses' with any genuine meaning.

While we're at the neck of the visuals, it would be a shame to leave the in-game presentation without a scratch or two and we'd be remiss in our duties if we neglected to say that they're about as weak as anything you'll see on the format. Contrary to the aforementioned hype, the PS3 iteration is a slapdash affair and pales considerably up against the 360 version. We're loathed to say this, as we were assured of *Project 8*'s proficiency by some early shots and footage, but it has suffered terribly at the wrong end of the ugly stick. The most disturbing of the graphical atrocities is a truly horrific frame rate issue that rears its ugly head whenever there are more than two characters on screen. This is one of the strangest and most unexpected aspects of this rendition of the franchise, as no

FIRST LEVEL TIMEWATCH

Has Neversoft really reinvented the Hawk's formula?

Before the action opens, you're treated, in what seems to be a feature of PS3 titles so far, to an unskippable intro. While this is bearable the first time around, just, after just a few days of play, you're ready to tear your eyes out. You have been warned.

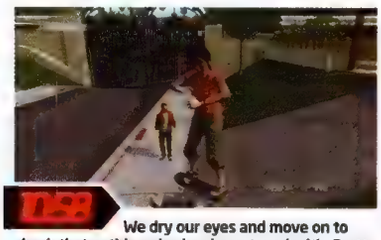


00:20 Your eyes are assaulted by this irritating clay baby thing on a skateboard. Look how he dances. Hahahaha. It's so funny, it's a clay baby with a freaky skull. With disco lights. Hahahaha.

04:42 After some disappointingly lengthy load times, you're into the main game menu and ready to start a career in skating. It really is as easy as that.

06:38 Here we are at the create-a-character mode. It's not as comprehensive as previous efforts, but you can usually find someone that looks like you, as long as you're a buff-skater.

08:18 You're in. Have a little look around and marvel at the significantly improved visuals. And find a half pipe to practice your specials.



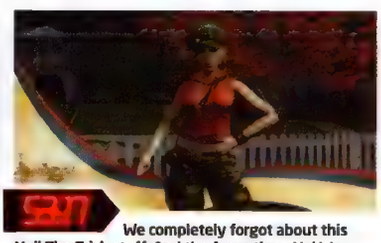
10:38 We dry our eyes and move on to check that nothing else has been toyed with. Pretty much every everything else is the same apart from an easier Natas spin and simpler flip mechanism.

24:36 We're charged with the task of jumping the fence. Oooooh, tricky. This introduces the challenges and the method with which they're delivered. It's much the same as previously.

38:38 We're now ready to Shag Dad's Balls, one of the 'comedy' challenges. Fortunately this is about as silly as they get. It just involves spine transferring over a couple of half-pipes.

49:09 We've finished shagging dad's balls and after a few more challenges the rest Podunk is opened up to us. We're beginning to see the first signs of a pretty woeful frame rate.

50:48 Hooray, we're into the skate shop and buying our pricey decks and stuff. Currency seems to be in the form of stokens. We don't know how to get more yet.



58:17 We completely forgot about this Nail The Trick stuff. And the focus time. Ha! We were getting bored with Podunk, but it's all coming back to us now, and the slo-mo effect is awesome.

1:32:44 We've discovered that these challenges are an integral part of the game. Just do exactly what you do best, and grind, manual, vert, natas spin and wallride in the places it tells you.

1:58:28 Almost exactly an hour into the game and we're going for it. Hitting up all the challenges and winning stokens by the handful.

SUMMARY: THE OPENING IS QUITE FRUSTRATING. IT'S CONFINED AND STRANGELY ANNOYING, BUT IT GETS BETTER, THE MORE OF THE WORLD YOU OPEN UP.

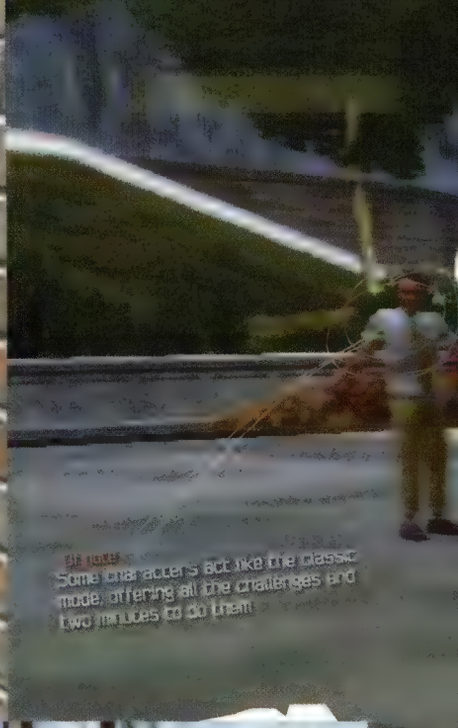
previous title had any such similar problem, leading us – for the first time – to think that *Project 8* is a shoddy port of a 360 title. The trouble is, normally in this situation – where one format's outing is clearly a better game than another – we'd simply suggest shying away from it in favour of the better version. We've played the 360 one though, and despite happily conceding that it's a better-quality title, the Microsoft controller is woefully inadequate for the task, making neither version incapable of living up to the potential. While nothing is in any way prohibitive; your gigantic combos are never likely to be harmed by skips in frame rate or poorly animated characters, the point is that when you've shelled out a small fortune for your PS3, such shoddy porting does little to bolster your faith in the power of the machine. Indeed, at first glance, and to anyone who hasn't seen some of the more proficient titles for the platform, you'd have to admit that it looks to be running beyond its capacity. A shame because it very much isn't. Knowing what the PS3 can do, *Project 8* shouldn't even break a sweat for the cell processor. Looking at this from an upbeat point of view, in a very roundabout way, this bodes well for the console market as a whole. Titles that persist in scrabbling across platforms in the way that *Tony Hawk's* has, will no doubt find that rather than gaining greater appreciation with a wider consumer base, the various limitations of each console will work to limit the overall quality. Instead of working to one machine's (or two very similar ones in the Xbox and PS2's case) constraints, slap-shod porting efforts like this will eventually receive the same kind of reputation that movie tie-ins have now. Hopefully this means the beginning of the end for lazy ports with the three major next-gen platforms taking three very different routes. It's perhaps up to publishers to understand this and deliver a more targeted experience as opposed to the kind of catch-all über-generic monster titles we're getting so horribly used to as an industry.

Of course this is going beyond the necessary in terms of a *Tony Hawk* review, but at the dawn of a new console, it's these massive third-party franchises that will more than likely dictate the expectations of a majority of gamers. Sad, but true. There are also other points worth mentioning as sub-par, or at very least sub-expectation. Let's take the mission types and structure for one. Neversoft have varied its approach to the skating areas significantly over the years. Moving from the hardcore gaming approach of the *Pro Skater* years, to the hardcore skating of the *T.H.U.G* and *Wasteland* era, the missions have changed accordingly, running from the likes of theme-based tasks, to high score challenges and those omnipresent

"Moving from the hardcore Pro Skater years, the missions have changed accordingly"

Profile
TONY HAWK

 27 POSTERS REPLACED
OLLIE WITH ✕ NOW
AIR ▲ TO WALLRIDE
LOOKS GOOD!
FS WALLRIDE
1.0
800


 Some characters act like the classic mode, offering all the challenges and two minutes to do them

nextGen

What defines this game as a 'Next-Gen' Playstation 3 title?

 NEXT: Perform different tric

Tricks on the fly

1 While it's a little like SSX On Tour's monster tweaks, the Nail The Trick mechanic requires a little more concentration and better timing. We're not saying slo-mos are the way forward here, but it works well in Project 8.

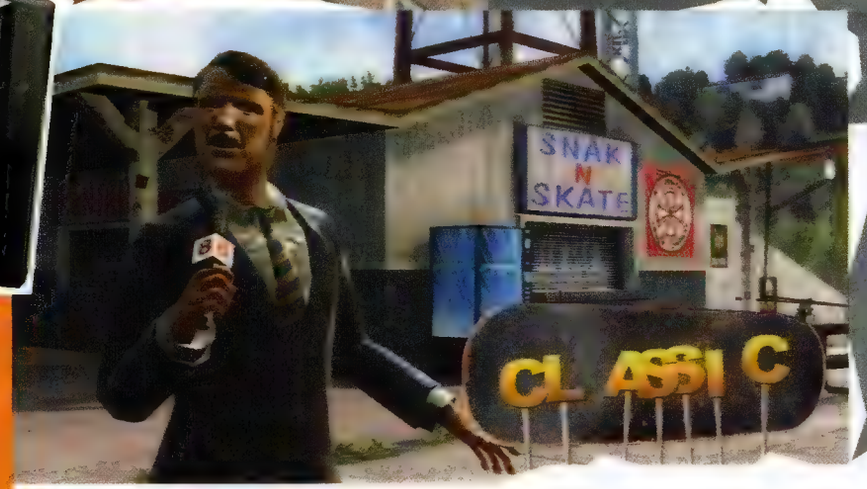
Real-time pictures within pictures full of next-gen goodness

2 The screen-in-screen in *Hawk's* shows that it can be done very well in real-time. When you knock over a fellow Podunkien, it'll be in a window in the corner. Very handy and quite slick.

Like for like, like, it's real lifelike. We like it.

 RODNEY MULLEN

3 Check out the likenesses. Wow, dude. They're like totally realistic and ultra gnarly, maaan. Not! Look into their mouths; it appears that each character has been forced to talk with a mouthful of broken lightbulbs and aluminium.


 SNAK N SKATE
CL ASSI C

CONTINUATION //

classic modes. While we've never had a problem with the difficulty level of many of these challenges – we do have sick skills, you know – the necessarily troublesome difficulty doesn't combine well with the duller tasks. There are some great new additions, most notably the filmer and photo challenges. Much like real skating, these charge you with the task of pulling off some sick tricks and rad moves in front of a camera. Sadly, however, these are overshadowed by the sheer weight of filler in there. Personally, we'd rather have quality over quantity, if not both, but *Project 8* doles out the least interesting batch of missions ever, often being both confusing and poorly thought out.

Take some of the photo challenges, for example; you're given a briefing by the chesty frau with the camera, followed by on-screen prompts. You're even lined up with the ramp most of the time, but exactly where the moves need to be pulled off is still a mystery. Sure, most times you'll get them, and they're amongst the easiest of challenges to complete, but the occasional mission that confuses so thoroughly as to render it undoable irritates in ways that only *Tony Hawk* can. The other major issue is the sheer boredom you'll encounter. The game opens with your character sat right at the very bottom of a table of 200 skaters, leaving you to claw your way to the top. Of course this means getting noticed by the top-notch skating talent like Mike Vallely, Rodney Mullen, Bam Margera and, of course, the great Hawk himself. Every now and again, as you climb this skating hierarchy you'll be invited to challenges and demos as well as gradually opening up the more standard missions. This is all about as unimaginative as it gets and while we wouldn't have an issue with this if the hundreds of missions were of a slightly more varied nature; but after a few hours it's clear that you're going to be skipping more than a couple of challenges on your way to the top. However, unfortunately you reach saturation point reasonably quickly and you'll be heading back to previous areas to complete the more tedious tasks, in order to open up new missions all too soon.

The worst culprit is undoubtedly the classic mode challenges that are not only dull in the extreme – they require a pact with the devil to complete fully. You may think this is just jealous ramblings; however, to complete an entire classic challenge demands that you complete the individual tasks, as well as doing them all at once in under two minutes. Sure, way back when *Tony Hawk's* had fewer levels and less expansive environments, this was a goal to work towards, but now all it serves to do in *Project 8* is give the compulsive masochists out there something to fuel their rage. Don't

Nail it!

The Nail The Trick system is well worth getting to grips with, as it can really bump up your scores. Timing is the key to pulling off the madder tricks, and mixing it up increases your score, giving you loads of extra multipliers. It can be preformed after any jump and works nicely to calm down the pace every now and again.

Challenges

Completing challenges, in traditional style, opens up different parts of the map. The varying characters dish out all manner of challenges. Very often they aren't particularly well described, leaving you a little confused and taking up more of your valuable time.

misunderstand us, we're perfectly happy with tasks that challenge, and require a little concentration, but what's being offered here is of completely different order.

Without attempting to be overly picky with *Project 8*, we can't overlook certain other irritations, such as the lazy create-a-skater mode, the irritating lighting effects and the poor delivery of some of the challenges, to name but a few. This iteration was supposed to be a way for the Neversoft team to strip away the detritus that has, unavoidably, built-up over the last decade or so of extreme skating action, in a genre totally dominated by one game. You've heard this numerous times before, and we're loathed to point it out again, but the series has been going steadily downhill since *Pro Skater 3*. Activision are clearly aware of this and have re-branded the series, tweaked the marketing focus and managed to squeeze more charisma and enthusiasm out of Hawk than we ever thought possible with both *T.H.U.G.* and *T.H.A.W.* It didn't work though, and what was once one of the purist hardcore titles out there became loaded up with superfluities and humour which, while perhaps suited to the skating culture, became irksome in the context of a vidoegame.

Project 8, to use a clichéd PR term, has been built from the ground up. Sadly, this appears not to have made much of a difference in many respects, and despite a greater emphasis on more realistic physics, the only appreciable difference is some ragdoll physics that serve to give you a wincing giggle every now and again. Many of the challenges are based around the use and abuse of said physics with bowling being the most fun. Much like Flatout, it gives you a certain amount of time to guide your floppy skater into a rack of pins. Not only do you have to crash into the pins, but if you want to go for a sick score, most of them require you to rack up a meaty hospital bill and break as many bones as possible. This is one area where *Hawk's* has improved somewhat over past efforts. Rather than mashing the pad

THE CONTROL SYSTEM

ABOUT THE CONTROL SYSTEM: U

Still as great as ever, and the best bit about the game

"This iteration was supposed to be a way for the Neversoft team to strip away the detritus that has, unavoidably, built-up over the last decade or so of extreme skating action"

Profile

BEAVER

This irritating idiot pops up all over the place and dishes out bizarre challenges. Some of them are quite useful, as they focus on individual skills and move sets

"We've been horribly harsh on Tony Hawk's Project 8 so far, but only because we expected so much from it"

CONTINUATION//

in order to get ever-more aggressive after taking a spill, your skater can be manoeuvred post bail, bounced around and crippled in so many ways it's lovely to watch at times. In addition to that if you ever feel like ending a combo with particular style, you can bail on purpose, sending your character flying into poles, walls, and anything else you think might hurt a lot.

We've been horribly harsh on *Tony Hawk's Project 8* so far, but only because we expected from much of it. We could forgive that a few niggles like the ones we've mentioned, but somehow, after almost a decade of development on skating games, Neversoft have failed to work together a title that will please the masses. *Tony Hawk's* is still very much the preserve of the hardcore gamer, and suffers for it.

The lack of online functionality is perhaps another reason for us to slate it, but in all honesty that's probably more to do with Sony than anyone else. So, you don't need to hear any more about why we don't like *Tony Hawk's Project 8* really. If you've got this far, you'll probably be of the mind that it's the worst game on the PS3. However, that isn't the case.

Project 8 is still very much *Tony Hawk*, and if you like the series you'll more than likely invest and happily overlook the frame rate issues that pretty much ruined our experience of the game. For our part we

HOW TO...

Pull off a million-point combo

While it may not seem particularly amazing, the scoring system in Project 8 is significantly harsher than any previous instalment. We're attempting to rack up a million combo. Wish us luck.

1 Find an appropriate space to start your combo. It should have a half pipe, a nice long grinding area and not too many things cluttering the place up for you too potentially bump into and lose your combo.

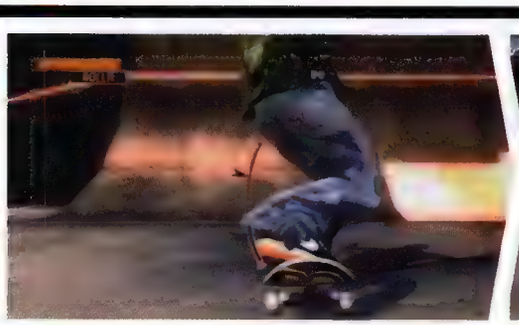
2 Have a good ol' muck around in the general vicinity. Find out what's natural to combo from and what might take a bit of work. Also make sure your move set is balanced with plenty of specials.

3 If you're comfortable with the area, it's time to start your combo. You'll need to make sure you have near enough a full special bar before you start, so pull of a quick practice combo before you start.

4 Your first step will be to get enough speed up for some gnarly air. Spine transfers are great for increasing speed. Start with some flip tricks. Triple impossibles are handy here.

5 You'll be looking to ratchet up the score with big specials and Nail the trick combos in the half pipe. You can maximise your score by flipping your board while the grip-tape is facing down, not just up.

6 Mix up your flips with a few grabs and kick off your focus to give you a little helping hand. Once you've performed one of each, just slide into an invert. Hold as long as you can for big points.



7 You're finished in the half-pipe, so as you come out of the invert, grind the halfpipe ledge to take you into an open space. It's time to bust out your flatland tricks, and in focus mode they're easy.

8 Remember that every time you jump, even if it's into a grind, you should try to pull off a flip trick from a boneless. This will help bring that combo multiplier right up.

9 After a nice long grind with plenty of trick changes and specials, you should be about out of focus. Hold the grind as long as you can and try to finish with a nail the trick off a big ledge for extra style.

SUMMARY: IT'S MIXED UP ENOUGH, SO THAT SHOULD MAKE FOR A COMBO OF AROUND A MILLION. GOOD LUCK...

enjoyed an awful lot of the game. We are, at heart, big fans of the series, after all.

What Neversoft seems to have overlooked, is there's a competitor snapping at their heels now. EA's *Skate* could well overtake *Tony Hawk's* as the premier extreme sports title: Project 8 simply hasn't produced the kind of improvements we really need to see. For our money it already has a headstart on the Activision franchise, if only in terms of freshness. It's sad to have to admit it, but we'd rather sit down and play *SSX On Tour* than *Hawk's*. Put them up against each other in almost every respect and the snowboarding title comes off best. Even compared to the PS2 version, this pales, if nothing else for the seriously choppy frame rate – a very sad state of affairs. Most aspects of the game have been improved, we'll give you that, but not by nearly enough to elicit a joyous reaction from us. We probably won't touch it past this review. There's no online function, the create-a-character mode isn't nearly as comprehensive as it used to be and the frame rate makes us feel like we're playing a sub-par version of an Xbox 360 title. Again, very sad.

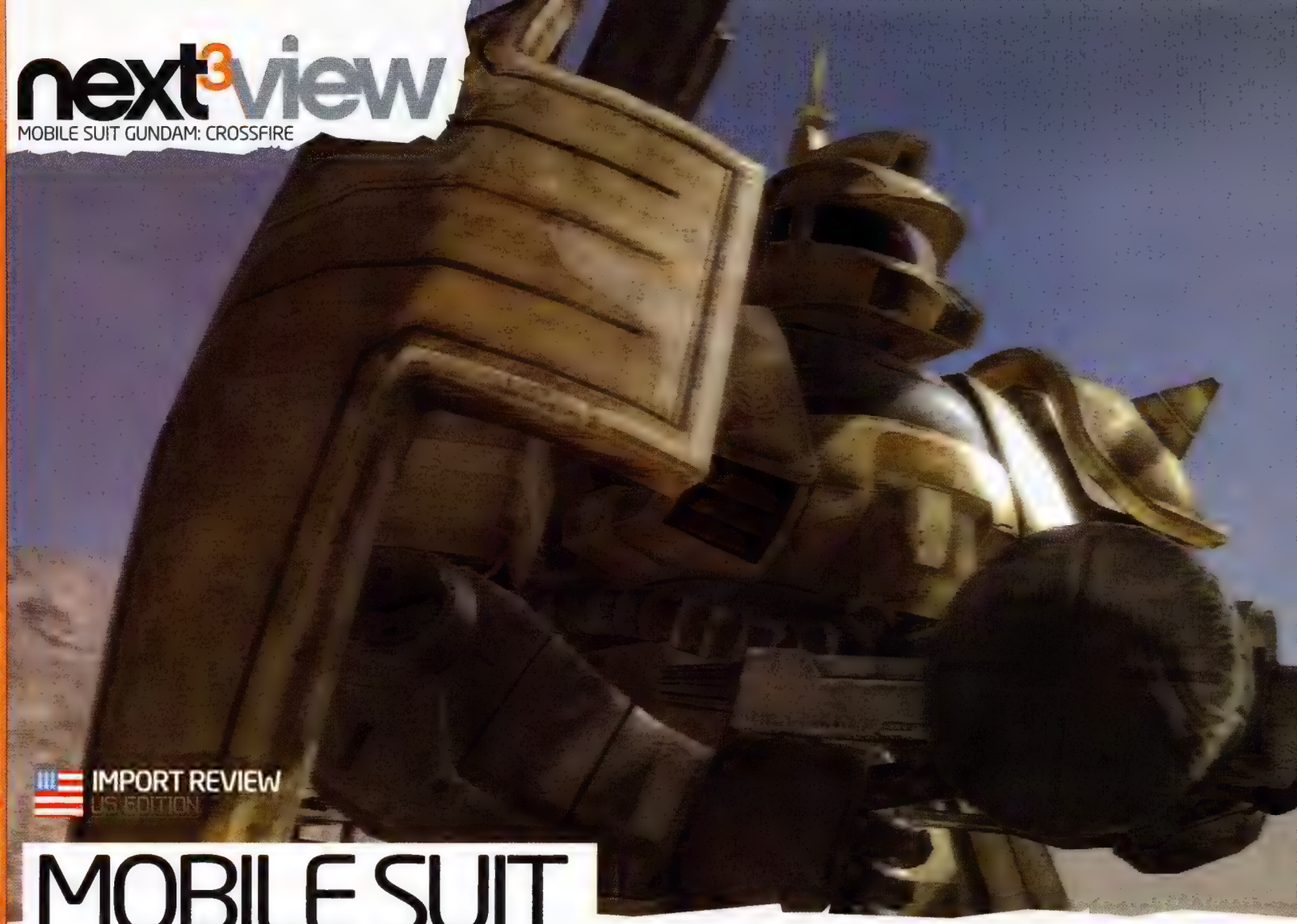
We're certain that when the PS3 comes of age, and Activision and Neversoft move on to *Project 9* or whatever, things will have improved significantly. Without the most basic of factors to keep us entertained though, we have to make it clear that *Tony Hawk's* is only just about passable in the same way that *T.H.U.G. 2 Remix* was on the PSP. Going back to our original point, Neversoft haven't yet had to face any real challenge to their supremacy in the field. Now is the time to see whether this effort is enough to keep the competition at bay. Will the name be enough to see the series flourish on the PS3? Sorry Tony, but we suspect not.

next3 verdict

OVERALL COMMENT

It's still Tony Hawk's, but many will find this port from the 360 version very much to its detriment. It makes the PS3 look like it's struggling, which is something of a sin.

06 OUT OF 10



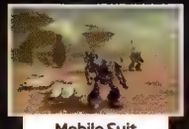
IMPORT REVIEW
US EDITION

MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM: CROSSFIRE

Gundam them all to hell

Gaming Family Tree

Gundam: Battle Assault PSone 2000



Mobile Suit Gundam: Zeonic Front PS2 2002

Mobile Suit Gundam: Crossfire PS3 2006

PS3 INFORM

Publisher Namco Bandai

Developer BEC

Release Date Out now

Price £Import

Players 1-2

Genre Third-person shooter

Supports 480p, 720p, 1080i, Dolby Digital

Age Rating N/A

Website www.gundamofficial.com

Demo No

OPINION// What is with giant robot games? Is it just us or are they totally dumb? If the technology to create a huge walking suit controlled by one man actually existed, would governments actually bother to make them? They're slow, cumbersome and make easy targets, not to mention the environmental damage they would doubtless cause. Come on – think about it. Stupid, huh?

Thankfully, the technology doesn't exist, as far as we know, and the only time we get to play with great big robots is in games like *Armoured Core* and this, the ridiculously popular *Gundam* series. Popular it its native Japan, that is. Apologies if this opening has been a little acerbic, but this is supposed to be the next generation of gaming.

The plot, as if it makes a difference, sees events kick off nine months after Zeon forces invade Earth. The Earth Federation is poised to make huge counter-attack in an attempt to stop the annihilation of the human race. You control Mobile Suits on either the brave Federation side or the nasty Zeons.

Beside the fact that it already irritates us just because it's one of 'those' giant robot games, which we guess someone out there must like, it might possibly be the least next-gen thing we've ever set eyes on. Whether this was rushed into production to bolster the release line-up or whether the majority of those involved just couldn't be bothered to harness even one tiny bit of the power available in the PS3, we don't know. What we do know is that it must have taken some doing to make a game for Sony's new machine that looks this bad. The frame rate is absolutely appalling and jerks all over the place. In fact, in times of increased action when you need to move around quickly, it actually makes your head start to hurt. Quite why there is such a problem getting things to run smoothly in such bland locales is anyone's guess. Not only is everything dull to look at but the maps are disappointingly small with your movement further restricted by an invisible wall that surrounds the mission area.

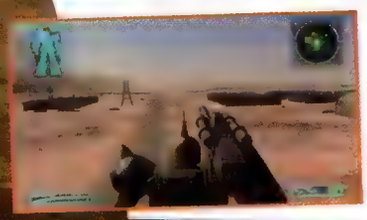
On the subject of the missions, the structure in which they are presented to you is actually one of the high points of this game. While not exactly open-ended, you usually have a choice of missions to undertake and as the game is based around a calendar, some missions become unavailable after time has passed. The campaign actually ends on the 31 December – whether you've finished the final mission or not. This adds a

BATTLE DAMAGED

This handy little indicator will let you know how damaged your mech is. If areas start to flash red then any more damage will result in that part being lost. You can survive without an arm or other non-essential parts, but if the torso is destroyed then the whole unit is lost.

Lock on
You can lock onto any target making it easier to fire at them and avoid their attacks.

Defence
The shield is can stop damage if you move it into position in time.



WEAPON OF CHOICE

At the beginning of the game you only get a couple of machine guns to mount on the arm of your suit. After a few missions are complete you will unlock more and more that range from high-powered rifles to rocked launchers. None are as fun to use as the melee weapons, however.

As you can see, ***Mobile Suit Gundam*** **really looks next-gen. That was sarcasm, by the way.**

THE CONTROL SYSTEM

ABOUT THE CONTROL SYSTEM: With no help at first you're left struggling to figure out just what's going on. You soon realise that simply walking is useless and makes any journey a slow and laborious one. Thank heavens for the boost button then, which gives your robot a quick speed boost. This is handy for evading attacks and covering lots of ground quickly. The buttons that the weapons are assigned to don't make much sense, though.

Straight forward once you get the hang of it but the lack of tilt is a shame

slight strategic element to proceedings, but not enough that you should get excited about it. In fact the calendar approach does have its downside too. For instance if you want to modify a Mobile Suit or perhaps purchase a new one then you need to wait a day or two for these events to take place. To forward time you must end the 'turn' via the menu screen, which is all well and good but gets more than a little tedious. Say you want to modify a Suit that is currently under repair – can you queue those two jobs so they take place one after the other? Oh no, that would be too easy. You have to end the turn so the repairs are done then go back into the hangar menu and request the modifications, then end the turn again. This constant to-ing and fro-ing gets irritating rather rapidly. Aside from that, the menu system is pleasing simple to use; however, it doesn't offer you a huge range of options. The aforementioned hangar doesn't allow you to do much in the way of tinkering and simply permits you to spend the points you've earned from successful missions on upgrades, new pilots or new Mobile Suits. You can change the Suits for different terrains but we can't say we noticed any difference – not aesthetically, anyway. You'd think a jungle setting would garner a camo paint job or something.

While the main menu hub is pleasing to navigate and look at, the post mission de-briefing shows itself to be one of the laziest parts of the game. After you've been given

Profile
RESTOCKING

you with a brief respite

next3view

MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM: CROSSFIRE

Profile

SNIPER

"With so little going for it, we'd strongly recommend steering clear of this"

nextGen

What defines this game as a 'Next-Gen' Playstation 3 title?

Mechs no difference

Could this be the hardest boxout we've ever written? Quite possibly. We guess the mechs themselves look quite next-gen... if you squint at the screen, and they're standing still, and you have a decent telly. Being short-sighted helps too.

CONTINUATION //

your score and ranking, a series of bland grey screens appear reporting on details relating to the mission, and what new parts have become available, along with other assorted snippets of information. This is all well and good but the grey boxes that present this information make it so uninviting to read that you'll often just skip past what could be potentially important. It's only a minor part of the game but one where the design has just been utterly forgotten.

The mechs themselves seem to be the only place where any sort of thought has been put in. Although some look like *Power Ranger* rejects, they will no doubt please fans and there is some pleasure to be had from coming to blows with an enemy robot, hacking chunks from it with your energy blade. Unfortunately, that pleasure is short lived as many of the weapons feel under powered. Even when you do destroy an enemy unit, the ensuing explosion and other assorted special effects are disappointingly underwhelming and you'll often find yourself going for the increasingly risky close-quarters combat, simply because it's more exciting. The battlefield does become a little more interesting as you rise up the ranks, as with this increase in authority you gain the ability to dish out orders to allies during the course of the mission, although these aren't particularly in-depth and don't really make that much difference to proceedings.

The combat may have been spiced up somewhat had the motion-sensing Sixaxis controller been put to use in some way. Alas, yet another of the PS3's innovations has been ignored in favour of the same old tired formula. The controls aren't that great as it is and no training or tutorial will ease you into controlling your mech. The main problem lies with the fact that of your three weapons, only one of them is situated on the shoulder buttons leaving you struggling to remember which is which.

The sound is similarly lacklustre with the massive, building-sized mechs making very

Profile

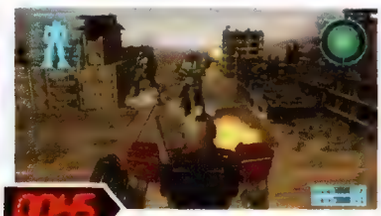
SCREW THE ENVIRONMENT

FIRST LEVEL TIMEWATCH

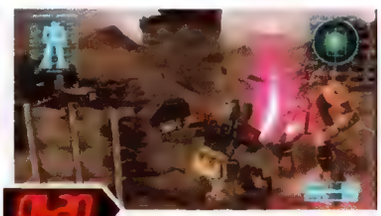
Do you feel powerful playing as a ten-storey high robot?

You're thrown straight into the action in the first level. Initially all seems quiet as you patrol a seemingly deserted and destroyed town, but suddenly three Zeon Mobile Suits appear to stir up trouble. Now all you have do is decide how to kick the crap out of them.

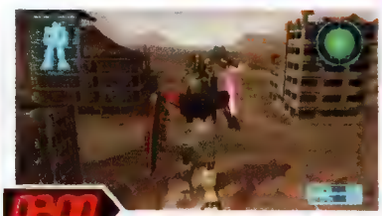
00:30 A generic lady on the radio goes on about something, but you're not really listening because all you want to do is shoot stuff.



00:45 The Zeon Mobile Suits appear and move in your direction. They don't look best pleased to see you so it's time to put them out of their misery.



01:20 You soon realise that your guns are underpowered and boring to use – it's time to break out that energy sword so you can fight up close and personal.

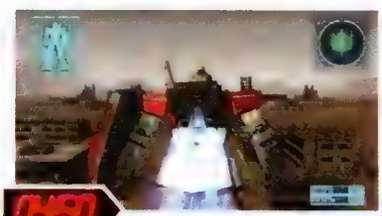


01:00 With the first enemy taking an absolute pasting from your sword with almost no resistance, you focus your attentions on the other two enemies lurking somewhere.

02:30 In your pursuit of the other two enemies, it becomes apparent that you can smash the buildings surrounding you with or weapons or simply by walking into them.

04:00 A few well-placed hits with the sword leaves the two enemy units on the ground minus various limbs or even their heads, if you're lucky.

04:20 You suddenly get an urgent radio message informing you of more incoming enemy units that you won't stand a chance against.



04:30 You quickly realise that your weapons are ineffective against this new threat and that the games wants you to run away in order to complete the mission - chicken.

SUMMARY: FOR A FIRST LEVEL IT DOESN'T EXACTLY GRAB YOU AND IT'S OVER SO QUICKLY YOU'RE LEFT WONDERING WHAT EXACTLY THE POINT OF IT WAS

little audible impact on the ground. Team this with weak weapon sound effects and a typically poor re-recorded voice over and you have a both visually and aurally bland game.

One saving grace of *Gundam: Crossfire* could have been the new streamlined online portion of the PS3 – just imagine running around a map with 20-odd human opponents blasting the crap out of each other with individually customised mechs. It could have been great if only the developers had bothered to put any sort of online content in at all. Instead you get a two-player split-screen versus mode – well whoopee-sodding-do. Not only is this woefully inadequate, but the stuttering frame rate renders it pretty much unplayable. It's an underdeveloped afterthought that might have well been left out altogether for all the good it brings to the game.

With so little going for it we'd strongly recommend steering clear of this, especially if you plan on showing off your shiny new console to Xbox 360-owning mates, who are likely to laugh in your face – hard.

Simon Griffin

next3 verdict

OVERALL COMMENT

This should be avoided by all but the most ardent mech fans. If you still own a PS2, pick up one of the old *Gundam* games for a fraction of the price, this offers nothing over those predecessors.

03 OUT OF 10

Mobile Suit Gundam **even struggles to render a decent map of the Earth. Look, it's not even as good a Google Earth. Even with big robots.**

IMPORT REVIEW
US EDITION

UNTOLD LEGENDS: DARK KINGDOM

The big game with tiny aspirations

Gaming Family Tree
Champions Of Norrath PS2//2004
Untold Legends: Brotherhood Of The Blade PSP//2005
Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom PS3//2006

PS3 INFORM

Publisher Sony

Developer Sony Online Entertainment

Release Date Out Now

Price £Import

Players 1-2 (2-4 online multiplayer)

Genre Adventure

Supports 1080i, 720p, Playstation Network

Age Rating N/A

Website http://dark-kingdom.station.sony.com

Demo No

OPINION// Over the years we've come to accept that, like it or not, console launch games do tend towards being sequels to, or versions of, games from the previous generation with marginally better graphics. Many PS3 launch titles are extensions of established PS2 franchises and, as such, fall into this category. We're not overjoyed about it, we're fine with it. It is to be expected. However, we weren't really expecting to play visually updated PSP games on our big, shiny new PS3. *Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom* is such a game, and we find that a tad worrying.

To be fair, there's a pretty good reason that Sony has decided to bring *Untold Legends* to the PS3. That being that it lends itself perfectly to online multiplayer gaming and will presumably be used as something of a testing ground for the PS3's online service. As a descendent of the *Gauntlet* school of co-op play, *Untold Legends* is an ideal choice if you want to get online with some mates and kill some stuff, without having to think too hard about what you're actually doing. Most of the fun will come from (hopefully) light-hearted arguments over who's killing the most enemies, who's hogging the pick-ups, and who keeps running off on their own and getting killed. This is partly because online banter is great fun and, we're sorry to report, partly because *Untold Legends* is not.

So what's wrong with it? Well, broadly speaking, its PSP heritage is far, far, far too apparent. *Untold Legends* on the PSP was essentially a dumbed-down version of *Champions Of Norrath*. Where *Champions* drew much influence from PC classic *Diablo* – with its ingenious mix of in-depth character development and straightforward button-whacking action – *Untold Legends* places its emphasis much more firmly on the action. It does away with the sophisticated character customisation system and replaces it with... well, combos and not a lot else. This made some sense on the PSP, as you don't want to be fiddling about with menus and stats on a handheld, although it nevertheless resulted in two decidedly mediocre games. On the PS3 though, it makes no real sense. The trouble is that complex character development and simplistic action complement each other. Simplistic action on its own is just boring. And when you know that you and your PS3 are both perfectly capable of handling something far more substantial, it becomes frustrating.

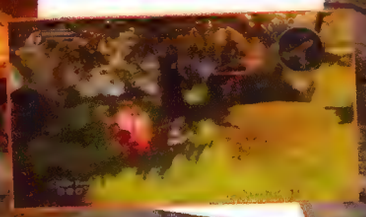
▽ MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM // UNTOLD LEGENDS: DARK KINGDOM // TIGER WOODS PGA 2007 △

OBJECTIVES COUNTER
This keeps count of how many of your objectives you've managed to compete. It's usually a certain number of things you have to destroy or kill. In this instance it's barbarians, plenty of whom are available to be slain.

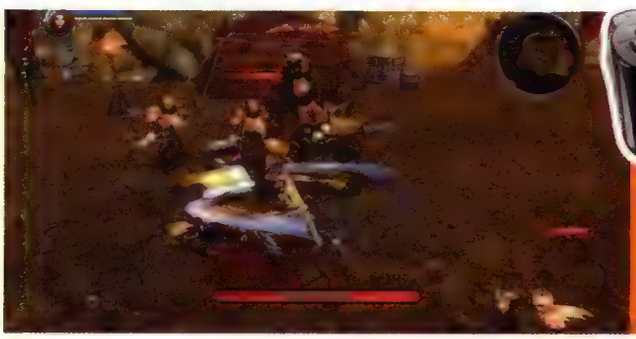
Every enemy has a health bar above their head. Useful for picking on the weak ones

Barbarians Slain: 6 / 10

COMBO INDICATOR
You can see what combo you've just pulled off down here. Most of the ones we do just involve hammering the same button over and over, especially when we're taking screenshots and only have one hand on the pad.



As far as we can tell, every enemy you meet in *Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom* sleeps standing up.



THE CONTROL SYSTEM

Very standard hack-'n'-slash stuff No skill required.

Profile
THE WARRIOR

When we think of quality hack-'n'-slash, we think of *Ninja Gaiden*, *Devil May Cry* and *Heavenly Sword*. All three of these games not only ooze style and class, but offer challenging and involving experiences too. When, in *Ninja Gaiden*, you jump over and behind two advancing ninjas, then decapitate them both in one fluid movement, you feel that, at that moment, you are one double-hard bastard. It's the kind of "someone else's shoes" escapism that characterises all the best games. Unfortunately, nothing like this ever really happens in *UL: DK*, you just plod along hitting things and letting off the odd spell. All of the available attacks and combos are too clumsy and samey, and do nothing whatsoever to differentiate your character from any other painfully standard warrior, mage or scout. A scout, in case you thought that sounded potentially interesting, is just your typical "thief" character without the criminal record.

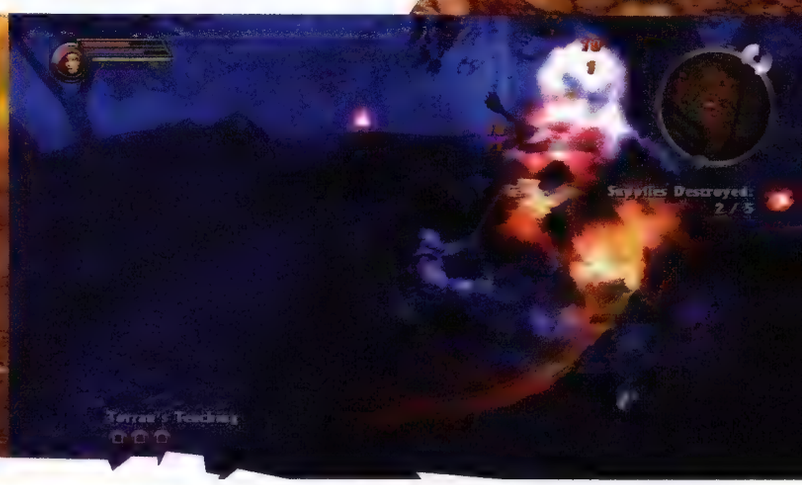
All this talk of lazily clichéd, non-descript character types brings us back to the absence of a decent character development system. The whole point of levelling up and collecting items and learning skills in games like this is that as your character improves, he or she also becomes more distinct, and more of an in-game alter-ego that you can actually identify with and call your own. This is especially important in multiplayer where the fun is in comparing your character to that of

Profile

THE SCOUT

She's got a good balance of magic and melee power and specialises in speed and agility. Fans of *Champions Of Norrath* will be disappointed to learn that you can't take her clothes off in the inventory screen though.

"It's just the same identikit characters wading through waves of equally interchangable enemies"



nextGen

What defines this game as a 'Next-Gen' Playstation 3 title?

Water way to have a good time

Traditionally, water is one of the hardest things to animate realistically, but *UL: DK* does a sterling job of rendering all things runny. It reacts convincingly when you splash about in it, and even bounces off solid surfaces realistically.

CONTINUATION//

other players and figuring out how you can complement each others' strengths and skills. But in *Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom*, you will discover that everyone, no matter what their level, is still pretty much the same warrior, mage or scout they started with.

What little character development there is here isn't just simplistic; it actually feels quite patronising at times. Take, for example, the concept of Essence. When it's first introduced to you Essence is described as a mystical source of power that could be used to create new equipment. But the first time you come to use it you discover that it's little more than currency used to buy items from a very limited, uninspiring range. It's is essentially a very lame attempt to make it look like the game has something different to offer, and we're quite offended that SOE thought we might go for it.

Also, whereas most games of this type allow you to equip various weapons and attach gems and runes to them to augment special characteristics they usually already have, *UL: DK* dispenses with the different weapons altogether. Instead you just get a limited selection of runes to fix to your one and only weapon. Curiously some runes actually change the appearance of your weapon. But anyway, whether it does or doesn't, you still use your weapon in exactly the same way no matter what runes are on it. It's one of many things that makes you feel like SOE has deliberately restricted what the game allows you to do because they couldn't be bothered to provide a broad range of experiences. The box boasts of how huge the game is, but that refers to the length of time it will take to complete and nothing else. In terms of its scope, this is an absolutely tiny game. There's no diversity at all. It's just the same identikit characters wading through waves of interchangable enemies.

And "wading" really is the right word. In a good hack-'n'-slash adventure, every encounter is different and fresh. It keeps you on your

Profile
THE MAGE

him to do a c
he'll set your bottom on
fire just by poi
it. The mage is a risky
choice in sin

FIRST LEVEL TIMEWATCH
Ever wondered how long it takes to kill a Badass Barbarian?

The first level of *UL: DK* introduces us to The Dragon's Shade, an elite brotherhood of powerful warrior and wizard types, sworn to protect the king and everything he stands for. At the opening of the game, a squad of Dragon's Shade fighters are on a mission to quell a barbarian uprising...

00:45 Right! We're off. There are rampant barbarians at large and it's our job to track down their chief and kill him. Shouldn't be too much bother.

01:46 We haven't even made it out of our own courtyard and the barbarians burst in. Just a few at a time so the pop-up windows can teach us basic combat.

02:38 Get in! Levelled up already. We have two points to add to our basic stats and one level to add to one of the two spells currently available.

03:15 After quite a lot more fighting and pop-up windows, we discover it's possible to pick up rocks. We also find a shrine, which is basically a save point and shop.

31:00 We've found our first rune. This one makes enemies invisible on the map, but others add extra damage to your weapon and can even change its appearance.

45:28 We've found the barbarian stronghold. In order to get in we have to jump up some rocks. Jumping isn't this game's best features.

48:11 We've learned a new spell. This one's a dark shade or purple and makes our enemies sleepy. Rather like warm Ribena.

94:02 We've found the chief. He insults the king, so we hit him over and over again until he falls to his knees. It takes a bit longer than killing the other barbarians.

SUMMARY: THE LENGTH AND REPETITION OF THIS LEVEL IS BROKEN UP BY LOTS OF TUTORIAL POP-UPS, MAKING IT SLIGHTLY LESS BORING THAN OTHER LEVELS

toes and consequently you bound your way through. We can't remember the last time we actually bounded, but we're sure it must have been loads more fun than wading. There are 30 levels in *Untold Legends* and they are almost all unnecessarily huge and characterised only by a total lack of variety. Objectives are never anything much more than basic collection missions. And in terms of the actual gameplay involved, ordering seven Dragon's Shade guards to your airship is much the same as destroying six haunted tombs. It's all about going to your objective and hitting anything that gets in the way.

So, it's limited, narrow and restrictive, but what little *Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom* does, it does reasonably well. It's a fun multiplayer no-brainer but isn't really any more that that. If you like fantasy settings and all the cliché that comes with them, and you're looking for something to play with some mates, then *Dark Kingdom* might just be worth a look. But RPG fans and hack-'n'-slash enthusiasts should steer well clear.

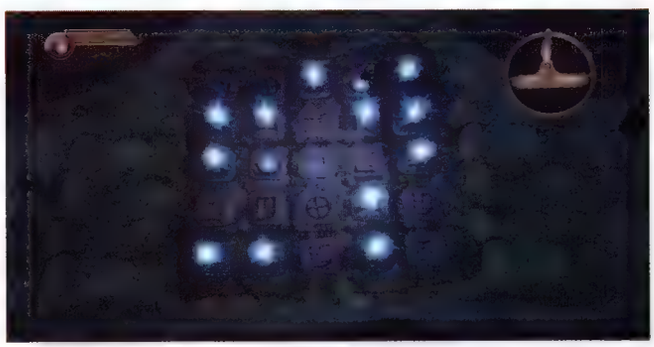
Gavin Mackenzie

next3 verdict

OVERALL COMMENT

We could have made good use of a hefty, expansive for our PS3. Instead we got this lightweight PSP spin-off, which was a bit flimsy even on its original format.

05 OUT OF 10

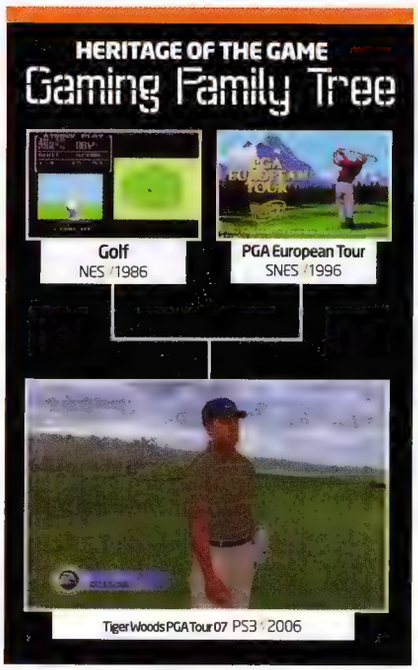


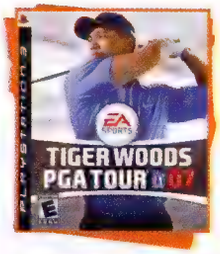
Occasionally, the drawn-out, tedious combat is broken up by drawn-out, tedious puzzles. This one is like the classic memory card game, only it's a test of patience rather than memory.

IMPORT REVIEW
US EDITION

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 07

PGA stands for Please Give Attention





PS3 INFORM

Publisher EA Sports
Developer In-house
Release Date Out now
Price £Import
Players 1-2 (2-4 online multiplayer)
Genre Sports
Supports 1080i, 720p, Playstation Network
Age Rating 3+
Website easports.com/tigerwoods07
Demo No

OPINION// Golf. Not exactly the king of bloodsports, the embodiment of hustle and bustle that can make a next-gen console stretch its manly limbs and throw polygons around like dirty toys. Consider: elderly men drive around in a glorified milk float looking smug and bourgeois, stopping to swing long bits of metal, then send their underpaid caddies after errant balls while tittering at him. That's not an attack on the sport because hey, who wouldn't want to live a life like that? Yet that luxurious way of living doesn't mean golf isn't the sport designed to make new consoles purr with delight. No special effects, no explosions, no huge gameplay advancements... no point? Not quite, but when EA's trademark "look at him sweat!" finger-pointing that accompanies its every sports release doesn't apply, you know you're in trouble. Hell, the only way to make a golfer sweat is wave a burger under Colin Montgomerie's nose (and no, that option isn't included. *Tiger Woods 08*, perhaps?).

So golf isn't the greatest of sports to show off next-gen console potential anyway, but what makes EA's job of impressing New Playstation 3 Owner™ even harder is they've done this golf thing so well, there's now little room for them to manoeuvre and improve. They've become their own worst enemy. Yes, there's a slight tweak to the control system, which makes fading, drawing and lofting feel more intuitive. Okay, there's a new mini-game called One Ball, which is fairly decent. And sure, you can do a song and dance about the few new golfers littered around the menus, waiting for your challenge. Yet it's hard to shake the impression that Smug New Playstation 3 Owner™, who wants his console to rise up and throttle him with pure next-gen joy, will struggle to see his gaming juices bubble when the most exciting thing here is playing spot the difference between *Tiger Woods* of old and new.

Not that *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07* is a bad game because of it. It's undeniably the

HOW TO...

Beat Mike Weir

Mike Weir is the first pro you tackle in the Tiger Challenges and doesn't offer much resistance to your pinpoint drives. Guess who the last pro you face is? Go on. Correct!

1 Start off with a powerful drive off the tee by tapping ⊗ while going through your backswing. You should be able to milk a nice 260+ yards out of your first drive.

2 Mike Weir is a monkey. He pretty much proves this with his first shot, which he often slices into the crowd or the rough to the right.

3 Press ◎ to help you aim for the crest of this hill here. You won't be able to make it directly to the green with your second shot...

4 As Weir proves. He often goes straight for the green; however, he lacks power so his shot dribbles down the hill into the rough.

5 Now hit the ball onto the green and you've got a nice easy put for par. Weir? He's probably in a whole different postcode by now.

SUMMARY: DON'T BE OVERAMBITIOUS AND WAIT FOR WEIR TO MAKE MISTAKES. BINGO!

THE CONTROL SYSTEM

ABOUT THE CONTROL SYSTEM: Push down on the left analogue stick, then flick it forward to hit your shot. Pretty simple, extremely intuitive and allows for a big enough margin of error that when you do nail the perfect shot, you feel damn good about it. Swinging the stick in diagonal directions will apply draw and fade to the ball, which is good for looking cool and... that's about it.

Easy, simple, intuitive, and a damn sight better than buttons and power bars

Profile

TIGER!

the ball like an Ibiza DJ

best golf game around and hell, if you've managed to avoid the series altogether up until this point, it could well be one of the best sports games you've ever played. The perfect balance between control and margin for error has been struck, with shots taken by pulling back then pushing forward on the analogue stick in a straight line. If you're slightly off to the left or right, then your shot will be slightly off too. It sounds forehead-smackingly simple, but it took EA to bring this formula to the golf party (every bit as boring as it sounds, by the way) before slowly chiselling away, improving this control system until it was perfect. It's immensely satisfying to hit the ball as far as you possibly can and watch your golf club explode through the ball to the point where you'll deliberately start using shorter-distance golf clubs, just so you can crank up the power and apply brawn over brains. It's not particularly strategic, but going full whack feels so right...

Then you get to the PGA Tours and you're forced to shift gears and slow down. You play through various dates, which host different tournaments of different difficulty levels on different courses against different golfers. We've used the word different four times but it's a case of same smell, different nostril – you're still playing for overall leaderboard position and money, with which to buy better items to dress your character with. Yet there's something strangely addictive about playing through what is essentially a glorified calendar, as you gather together enough money to enter the bigger tournaments and start tackling the pros. All *Tiger Woods* ever needed was this PGA Tour and a working online mode to keep its fans happy for another year. This *Tiger Woods* has both. And yet EA has managed to cram in even more beyond that to make this worth your while.

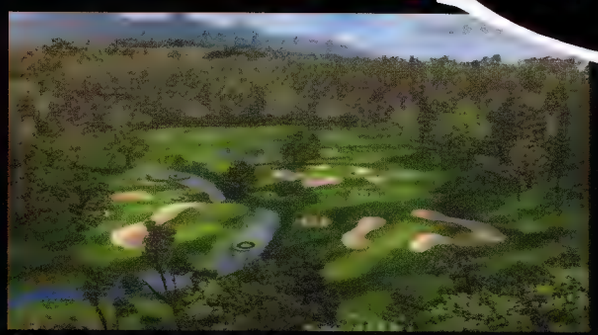
That's because beyond the PGA Tours, there is a ridiculous amount of mini-games on offer (quick translation: more than

"Hell, the only way to make a golfer sweat is to wave a burger under Colin Montgomerie's nose"

The preset animations before each shot, as you'd expect from EA, are brilliant.

"It all looks lovely too, with the usual sheen and gloss you'd expect from an EA sports game"

nextGen
What defines this game as a 'Next-Gen' Playstation 3 title?



Next gen courses!
They're a lot bigger than last time and you'll also notice the NextGen Groundsmen™ have painted huge NextGen Circles™ everywhere, giving more things to aim at when using NextGen Control™.

CONTINUATION//

ten). While there are a few mini-games that riff on the same theme, such as 21 and Seven, the rest are different enough that each mini-game demands a new technique and strategy to it. Mini-games for two players, mini-games for four players, mini-games for new players, mini-games for online players, every base has been covered here and done pretty damn well. Kudos to EA for including so many and actually managing to find enough room to squeeze in plenty of variety to them all.

As always, there's a shining option in the mini-game option with the word 'NEW!' plastered next to it in a desperate attempt to convince you that this sequel does contain plenty of improvements. In this case, the mini-game saddled with the patronising 'NEW!' tag is One Ball, where two players take turns to strike the ball. The player who sinks the winning putt takes the match and no shot can fall less than half the distance to the hole, meaning you're playing for position rather than wellying it as far as possible every time. It can get surprisingly tense as both players jostle for position and don't want to avoid playing a bad shot that gives their opponent incentive to take a risk. Yet, it suffers from the problem that there's no tension or drama until you get near the green but hey! At least it's NEW! Chalk up 'One Ball' with 'Colin Montgomerie's Burgers' as something to improve for next year's version.

It all looks lovely too, with the usual sheen and gloss you'd expect from an EA sports game. Character animations show you how well you're doing, with a cute window-in-window reaction from your golfer as you watch your ball fly towards the green (or more pertinently, towards a terrified spectator in the crowd). Golf isn't a game that has plenty of room for EA to flex its graphical muscle and really show off and thankfully, this year is relatively restrained and cuts down on all the slo-mo and stutter effects for really powerful

Chain Reaction
If your golfing knowledge is slightly askew, as it will be for 99.99% of us, use the reactions of your golfer to judge how well you're doing. He won't throw his golf club into the crowd and stamp his feet unless he's hit a terrible shot. Or he's Happy Gilmore.

Swing, Swing, Swing
Mastering the swing is crucial to becoming any good at *Tiger Woods*. Check your aim first and if the landing circle overshoots the hole, use slightly less power when pushing the analogue stick and then throw in backspin for good measure.

Caddy tips help out in the early stages, which is nice.

Your name flashes up in typical American sports-style presentation before each shot – brilliant if you've called yourself something rude out of boredom.

strokes. Despite being hemmed in and not given much room to throw its weight around, *Tiger Woods* still looks wonderful. And yes, for those of you wondering, the grass does look lovely. "It looks just the same as last year's grass!" shout the cynics. Of course it does. It's bloody grass. What do you expect?

Grass aside, the sterling visuals make it all the more surprising when closer examination shows there to be chinks and cracks in the presentation armour that betray the size of the cheque EA threw at its visuals department before scarpering back to the marketing department, as the words "Make everything look nice!" echoed down the corridor. If you misfire and slice your ball into the crowd, sometimes you catch an unsuspecting fan in the knackers, complete with comedy animation as they wince and double over in pain. Brilliant! The inner child at you laughs at golf-ball-to-mans-balls pain and when the option comes up to replay, you can't help yourself. Except the replay shows your ball now hitting their leg, completing with shin-rubbing animation. Then the third replay shows one spectator sliding around without moving her legs, while the ball stops dead in the mid-air where the spectator once stood. It's all very odd and shatters the illusion that *Tiger Woods* effortlessly weaves elsewhere. Meanwhile, the commentators offer little more than a few slightly fed-up observations on your driving accuracy, as though they're more interesting in picking their nose and wondering when Konami are going to call about that *Pro Evo* commentary gig they promised a few years ago. It's these little glitches that don't tear through the experience but nibble away on the outsides, making *Tiger Woods* look needlessly tatty.

So it comes to pass that *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07*, despite Tiger smiling with psychotic glee on the back of the box, can't really make that final leap into greatness and into your life. It's good, it just doesn't really tickle your sides and make you giddy in the same way that a copy of *Resistance* or *MotorStorm* can. Next-gen console launches are about the new, the brave and the tantalising glimpses into the future. Rather than that, this is about the familiar; it's not so much experimenting with new recipes, but reheating what it already has and feeling confident that you'll like it. *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07* is as complete a golf game as you're ever going to get, and whether that's enough to ensure this jumps on your 'to buy' list depends on how excited that statement makes you feel.

Ryan King

next3 verdict

OVERALL COMMENT

What is next-gen? It's not *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07*, that's for sure. While it is undeniably good fun, it struggles to truly stand out in the hustle and bustle of a console launch.

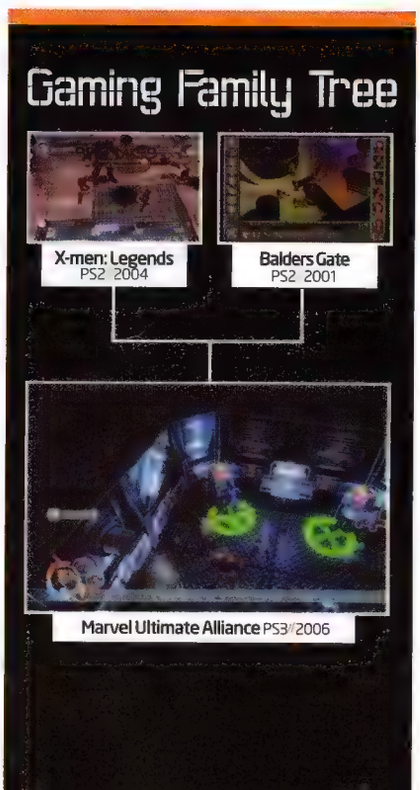
07
OUT OF 10

Profile
DONALD!
You won't recognise most of the golfers here once you get past the likes of Woods and Singh, so it's hard to tell their abilities apart until you start playing. Don't pick Donald! He sucks.

IMPORT REVIEW
US EDITION

MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

Hopefully it's 'Ultimate' as in 'Last'



PS3 INFORM

Publisher Activision
Developer Raven Software
Release Date Out now
Price £Import
Players 1-4 (2-4 online)
Genre Action/RPG
Supports 1080i, 720p, Playstation Network
Age Rating 12+
Website www.marvelultimatealliance.com
Demo No

OPINION// With over 140 of your favourite Marvel characters and 17 "exotic locales" you can build a team and battle against some of the most fiendish enemies that the Marvel Universe can throw at you! And it's on the PS3, the most powerful console on the planet, which if it had a face it could even have been an X-Man. Perhaps. Anyway, it's enough to make you grow a moustache and shout "Excelsior!" Nuff said.

No not nuff said. How about: "It's a bit like *X-Men Legends* but with different characters and with better, shinier graphics"? Not quite so "Excelsior" now is it? You Stan Lee wannabe. And so *Marvel Ultimate Alliance* goes on the rapidly growing pile of average PS3 games, next to *Genji* and on top of *Mobile Suit Gundam: Crossfire*.

Right from the first cut-scene the realisation is there that this is just *X-Men Legends III*, due to the oddly-shaped characters. They just don't look particularly good in 3D. They act like marionettes. They don't look real. They don't sound too bad; however, there's still that niggling feeling that the design and animation was farmed out to someone who doesn't know that the Hulk was grey, not green, in the first issue of *The Incredible Hulk*, or any other piece of Marvel comic trivia.

When you begin *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance*, you start with a team consisting of Norse god and *Avengers* member Thor, your friendly neighbourhood summer blockbuster franchise Spider-Man, dull Captain America and, he was in *X-Men Legends I* and *II*, everyone's favourite adamantium-laced mutant: Wolverine. So the team consists of a guy who's good at hitting people, another who fires projectiles (called web-bullets), Captain A does the same (but with his shield obviously) and Wolvie is good at fighting up-close. And so the button hammering commences.

It's strange how quickly the déjà vu strikes. Instantly you're back to a year or so ago sitting in a room getting bored playing *X-Men Legends* on the PS2. Only it's in the present time and you're playing exactly the same thing on the PS3.

Role-call
There are over 20 superheroes to play as, some of them the big stars of Marvel comics such as Wolverine, Captain America and the Fantastic Four, and then you have the losers such as Spider-Woman, Elektra and Ms Marvel. Hey, they're all women! This makes us sound really, really sexist.

The spot effects look nicer than the PS2 version. But not a lot else.

It's a massive rumble
Every level is made up of corridors and then enemies appear and try to beat you up. So you and the other three heroes hit them back and things explode. If you get lost you can look at the map and see which bits you haven't uncovered.

Finishing objectives is quite pleasing as it gives you a decent amount of experience points.

Everything from the *X-Men* games is here. The narrow corridors of a cybernetic factory that has doors you can open with the press of a button rather than slashing through them using claws made of the strongest alloy on Earth (that's adamantium, non-believers! Hang on, Adam-Ant-ium? Adam Ant?! Weird) still make things feel claustrophobic. The awkward camera angle returns, which is always either too far away to see anything in any detail, or to close and your screen lights up in a confusing mess of energy beam and explosions. And of course the gameplay has remained the same: hammer away at ⊗ and ◎ while pretending you are performing the combos that can trip, launch or disarm the enemies. Then, when you remember your team isn't just made up of humongulous mongoloids and that they have awesome super powers, you start holding down R1 to access these powers.

Again you can fire projectiles, use offensive and defensive status effects, use an area attack, miss with a preset combo attack because you activated it way too early. There are the super special powers as well, but these always equate to a smart bomb destroying enemies on the screen with some fancy lighting effects.

With each use of your super powers your meter drops a bit, and when you get hit your health goes down, but you don't have to worry about it too much, thanks to all the health and super meter restoring items the enemies drop. Even if you feel you're running a bit low on accessories, you can destroy the scenery (again) to weed out more items and power ups. Occasionally you might find a hole in one wall that leads you to an object, these usually grant a specific team member a huge increase in stats. Unfortunately, you can only equip these when your character reaches the required level and by the time you've got them to that point, there is usually a much better accessory available, anyway.

It just takes so long for a strong character like Thor, even when swinging the Mjolnir, to bash through a wall, especially after all the time you spend whacking the enemies. It also begins to feel like a chore to find these accessories and other hidden items that unlock more characters to play with. This feature turns out to be pretty inessential when you actually realise just how limited the characters are.

When you tire of your current line-up you can change the team on the extraction points, yes just like before. When we played it we traded in The Thing, Mr Fantasic, Spider-Woman and Dead Pool. So now we had a guy who is quite good at hitting things, one who has some long-range attacks due to his

Profile
AGENT OF SHIELD

"It's a bit like X-Men Legends but with different characters and with better, shinier graphics"

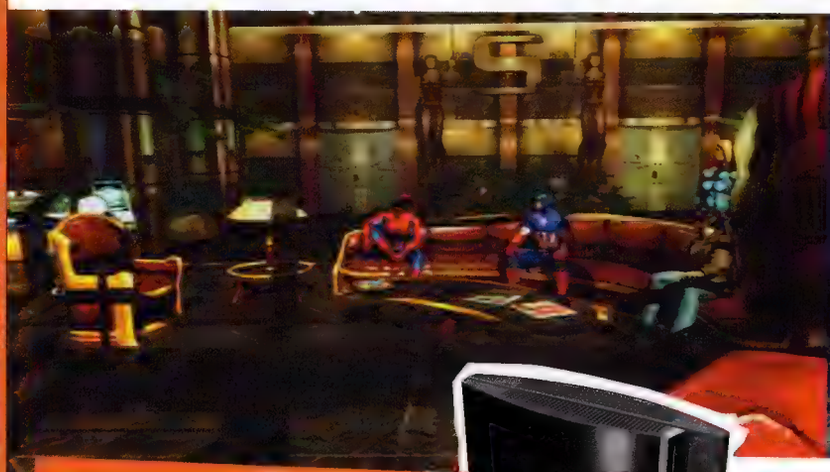
Nick Fury has awful depth perception, but he doesn't let it hold him back.

Profile

SPARKY

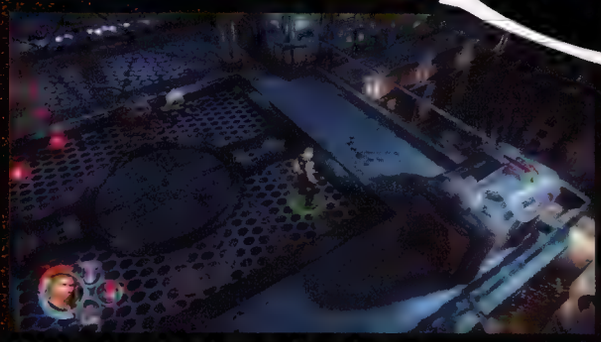
Elektra is in *MUA*, but we urge you not to play her after that other dire film. Actually both of those dire films, you know *Daredevil* and *13 Going On 30*.

"Very quickly, déjà vu strikes. It's like playing X-Men Legends on the PS2 all over again"



nextGen

What defines this game as a 'Next-Gen' Playstation 3 title?



We're kinda struggling here

Umm, the plot? No. The characters? No. The level design? No. Sound? Maybe, it's alright we guess. Online! Tut, we've said that. Sod it. Look there really isn't anything all that next-genny about *Marvel Ultimate Alliance*. Happy?!

CONTINUATION //

limbs, Spider-Woman does energy attacks and Dead Pool is excellent at fighting. Hang on! That's exactly what the last team was like! So although you have these different characters they still fall in to the same groups of long range, short range, status effects and so on. There really isn't enough diversity between them. Oh, and that bit about there being over 140 characters in the game? Well, unfortunately, there are only 25 characters to play as, and since it doesn't really matter who you pick because they have got almost identical powers, you could end up looking at exactly the same people on the screen for most of the game. This has always been a complaint of the *X-Men Legend* games and it's annoying to see it still continuing on with the new game.

However, the one feature that the *Legends* games had going for them was the whole fan service thing. While most of the game is all about uncovering the map of whatever level you're on and bashing the enemies, it cannot be denied that the research has clearly been done and all the nods to the comics does give the impression that some effort has been put into this. It's even fun to test out your own knowledge of Marvel's comics by doing the quiz, and it offers rewards for this because each correct answer will bag you a few extra experience points.

You can also gain extra stat points by developing your team, either by picking a recognisable one from the comics, such as The Fantastic Four or The Avengers and so on, or by creating your own team, including insignia and by distributing the experience you get for various team bonuses.

Of course, with this being a PS3 version of a multiformat game, the focus is on the graphics and not what is being done on other platforms with the limited gameplay. And the graphics are... okay. Again, the camera view can be blamed for not letting you see enough, but the special effects when a superpower is unleashed

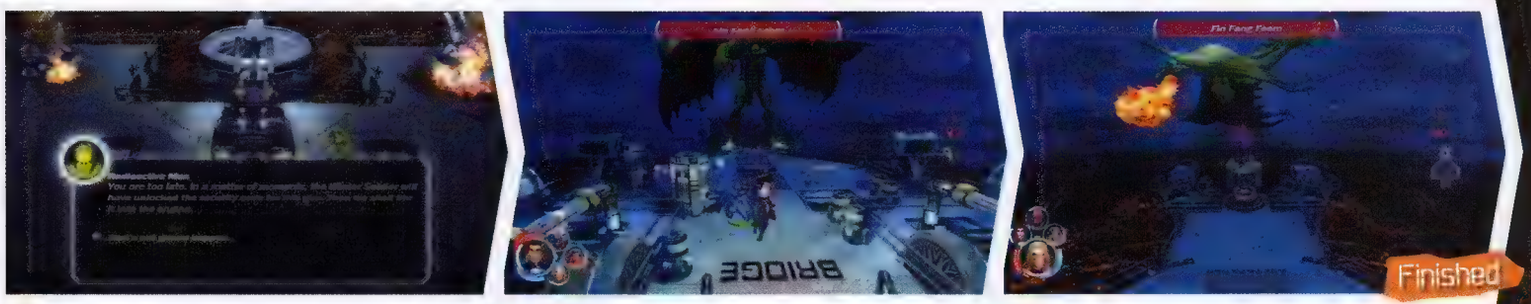
HOW TO...

DEFEAT FIN FANG FOOM

He's a dull bit from the early stages of the game. You've to get past a forcefield and then tackle the first big boss. You have to flick switches and use a turret, blimey!

1 Swap some blocks about to get rid of the first force field. This bit's great if you've never done a block-pushing puzzle before, not so good if you've done it loads.

2 Then press one switch, then the other in this room to turn off another force field. If you like hitting switches then you might like this!

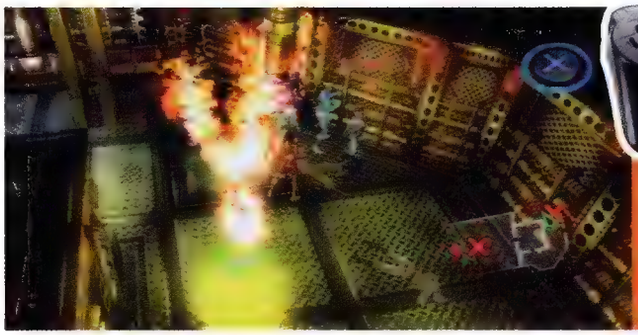


3 Then Radioactive Man, who we thought was just a parody in *The Simpsons* not a real Marvel character, says some stuff.

4 Fin Fang Foom makes an appearance and he's obviously not embarrassed about his stupid name. You can punch him in the knees or...

5 ... use the cannon to shoot him while he's hanging in the air. Either way he soon plummits to the ground and as a reward you get some experience points.

SUMMARY: YEAH, WE DIDN'T REALLY ENJOY THAT SO MUCH, APART FROM RADIOACTIVE MAN. HE MADE US SMILE.



THE CONTROL SYSTEM

ABOUT THE CONTROL SYSTEM: There are a few things the tilt function of the Sixaxis controller can do for your squad of superheroes. Our favourite is when you grab someone by pressing ◻ and then you can throw them in any direction you like, simply by waving the pad about. You can even throw them into things and create big explosions. You don't have to do this though, you can just choose a direction with the analogue stick.

A small amount of tilt functions if you want to bend your wrists a bit.

are nice. Johnny Storm's beams of fire light up the screen like a bonfire on 5 November. Every time Thor swings his hammer, or The Thing decides it's "clobberin' time", there is a great effect that sees the picture bend and ripple. Unfortunately, when everyone uses their powers it becomes rather difficult to see anything with the screen lit up so much, and sometimes it can even cause you to lose track of where the character you're controlling is on the screen.

Even more unfortunate is that as soon as around three or four effects are going on the game stutters, the frame rate drops and anyone who is playing it immediately snouts "Slowdown!" in an effort to prove they're really knowledgeable about these things. Okay, so it's a launch game, which we are sure means that the developers haven't got used to the hardware yet and lots more excuses as to why this is happening on the most powerful next-gen console but... the thing is, it really ruins the game that little bit more. It's not that great to start with anyway, the gameplay isn't exactly mindblowing, and having slow-down extending the time you have to play it isn't really much fun at all.

In a more legitimate extension of gameplay, *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance* does offer online modes. You can play co-operatively with friends or strangers online and, well, that's about it. When taking part in co-op, the game helps out the player with the lowest experience points by dishing out more to help them catch up; so it might be good for a bit of power-levelling if you really want a decent team of heroes. However, it may be quite difficult to find anyone to play with you – we tried really hard but couldn't find anyone who wanted to take us on.

Despite all of *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance*'s shiny, colourful and juddery graphics there isn't much else that seems like you're playing anything new, and if you really want to play it you could always just get for the PS2 or something. Aww, we've just found out that Captain Marvel is an exclusive character in the PSP version, maybe we'll play *Marvel: Ulimate Alliance* on that tucked up in our nice warm beds instead, shazam!

Tim Empey

Profile

DC IS MUCH BETTER

Not games-wise obviously, both *Superman Returns* and *Justice League Heroes*

next3 verdict

OVERALL COMMENT

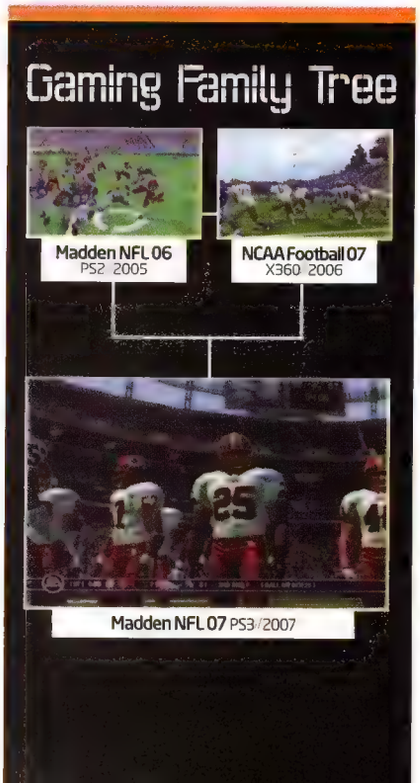
The series hasn't exactly come on very far since *X-Men Legends II* and unfortunatley no amount of shiny Lycra-clad heroes can really drag the formula into the next generation.

06 OUT OF 10

IMPORT REVIEW
US EDITION

MADDEN NFL 07

No football on the PS3? You'd better think again



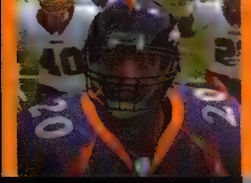
PS3 INFORM

Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA Tiburon
Release Date: Out now
Price £Import
Players 1-2 (2 online)
Genre Sports
Supports 1080i, 720p, Dolby Digital, Playstation Network
Age Rating 3+
Website http://www.easports.com
Demo No

OPINION// Pick up a copy of *Madden* and you will see pretty quickly where EA's energy goes when it comes to sports sims. It doesn't get any flashier or accomplished than *Madden NFL 07*. At least that was always believed to be the case before *Madden NFL 06* was released on the Xbox 360, in what can only be described as a half-assed, incomplete form. Thankfully, most of what was lost from *Madden*'s first venture onto a next-gen console has returned in *Madden NFL 07*, and that's the version of the game that we'll get to enjoy. However, the lack of quality in the *06* edition has meant that we can only approach this latest release with a large amount of scepticism and doubt in our minds. This may be the bigger, bolder and better next-gen *Madden*, but will EA find another way to screw us over?

We're pleased to say that it hasn't, although the game still lacks some of the options and subsidiary distractions that exist on other versions of the game. One notable absence is the full mini-camp that offered a great many training games that helped rookies and veterans alike to hone their skills and familiarise themselves with the control set-up and playing style. It is limited to the relatively safe training games and bench-presses, which is disappointing. After all, playing *Madden* is largely about personal style and approach. You choose your play, you choose your pass and then you execute that play at your own discretion. Liberty, equality and fraternity are as important to *Madden NFL* as they were to the French in 1789 and the level of freedom you are given, despite the sport's strictly defined mechanics of play, is always a joy to behold. A limitation in background options beyond the standard match play and season modes detracts a little from the package on offer. Should you feel short changed? You wont be getting the complete package that's for sure, but you are getting a gorgeously remodelled *Madden* that is light-years ahead of its PS2 counterpart graphically.

It may not be the be all and end all but by God this is one good-looking game. From each blade of grass to the glossy sheen on every helmet, *Madden NFL* has never looked so good. It's not just a matter of textures and bump mapping either. The dynamic details such as pitch degradation and muddy uniforms really helps to put you in the thick of the play. Sweat visibly drips from the faces of



HOW TO...

Score From Kick-Off

Scoring a touchdown on *Madden* is never an easy task, but it's even harder to pull off when the entire opposition is free to chase you down. However, this can leave some space to score.

Start here

1 After making a clean catch from the kick-off, head for centre-field to draw some of the wider defenders inside. Be sure to keep your blockers ahead of you at first.

2 Now there's a space on the right, so charge in that direction. With any luck your offensive linemen will have cleared some room for you to make your run up the line.

3 You're not out of the woods yet, but there's nothing but green grass between you, the end zone, and six glorious points. Hold down RT to sprint away from the defenders.

4 As you run out of puff the defence will lunge at you in the hope of dragging you down. Keep moving in one direction and you should shake them off with any luck.

Finished

5 You're free and clear and while it's not entirely necessary to do so, we always like to dive into the end zone for that extra dramatic touchdown. You've earned it for sure.

SUMMARY: THIS IS MUCH EASIER WHEN PLAYING MULTI-PLAYER SO TRY IT OUT.

THE CONTROL SYSTEM

ABOUT THE CONTROL SYSTEM: Madden's use of the Sixaxis isn't exactly essential, but worth some credit nonethele Flicking the controller while on defence performs devastating hits on the opposition and in the line of scrimmage can get you a jump on the snap. On offence the options are more limited, but flicking the controller when on the line of scrimm fakes the snap and can get you a penalty if the defence reacts

Interesting, but hardly essential or very instinctive to use

your offensive and defensive linemen as they await the snap and then it flies into the air as they collide.

This is set-off beautifully by some great animations that are sometimes player specific. Shaun Alexander, for example, has an easily identifiable running style on the field of play. For the lesser players there are still some variations in playing style, depending on height, weight and running speed that differentiate players from one-another and create some pretty explosive hits when different players come into contact. Tackle a receiver on the right and they'll fall to the left, catch them on the left a second later and the ball will be fumbled. There's a physicality here that previous *Madden* games could only fabricate. Visually, you really couldn't feel closer to the action.

However, what really brings you into the thick of the line of scrimmage are the sound effects, which are truly superb and more than deserving of praise here. Perhaps the commentary is annoying, but the player sounds effects are excellent from every grunt to every venom-tinged insult thrown across the line. This is a family game so the language is obviously much milder than you might normally find on a football pitch. Frankly there was stronger language in *Fraggle Rock*, not that we're complaining at all. The gratuitous use of abusive language in games is one of many bugbears in this industry and one that sports games are thankfully free of. *Madden NFL*'s namesake is limited to cameo appearances and the odd piece of advice when choosing your play. We've always found *Madden* a handy companion on the touchline when choosing our defensive plays. His own particular brand of jovial support is rather comforting when the snow is beating down from the bleak skies and we're down by 14 points against the Patriots. For those with a much deeper understanding of American Football, he'll barely make his presence felt at all. It's one example of how the presentation of

Profile

THE MADDEN CURSE

"Perfecting your running game is the equivalent of having a shotgun you've forgotten about"

"I see you baby, shakin' that...er," yeah we best leave things there in case they come after us.

Profile

STEELING FIRST

The Pittsburgh Steelers may not be the first team that pops into your head when thinking of the NFL, but as winners of Super Bowl XL they're the best team this year

"Purely in terms of entertainment, playability and graphics Madden NFL 07 is superb"

nextGen

What defines this game as a 'Next-Gen' Playstation 3 title?

NextGen physics!

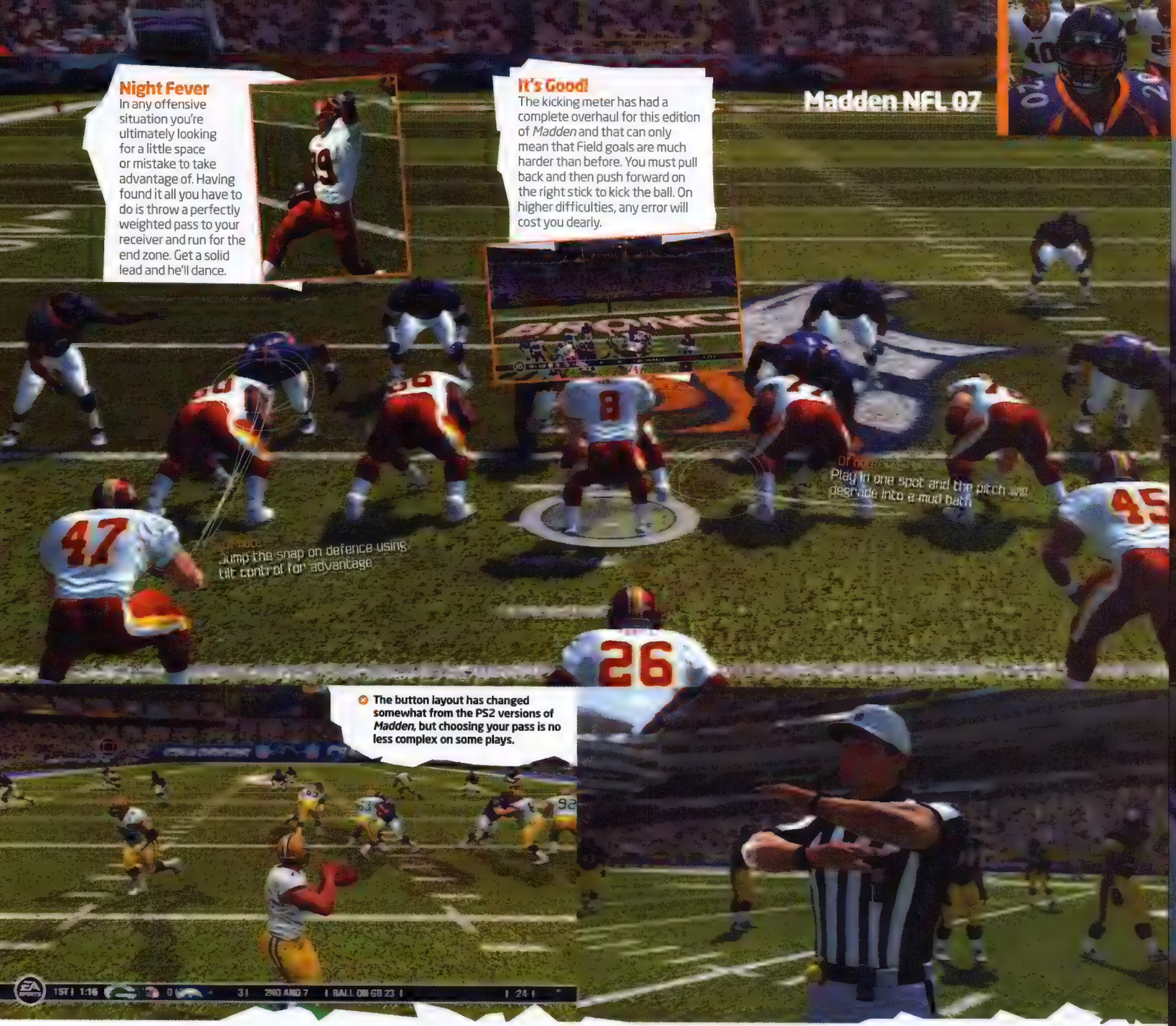
Never before has the physicality of American football been so brilliantly rendered as in this year's edition of *Madden*. You can feel every hit and with practice you can force fumbles by double-teaming the opposition.

CONTINUATION //

the game lacks a little in comparison with other EA Sports titles as well as other 2K Sports games.

All of EA's menus this year are almost identical for every sport so if you've seen one, you've pretty much seen them all. However, titles that have already been on the Xbox 360 such as *NBA Live* and *FIFA 07* showed a far greater amount of flair and polish than *Madden* has. In particular, the playable loading screens that have impressed many on next-gen consoles so far. 2K Games' *NBA* and *NHL* games are also very well presented with smart selection screens and option menus. *Madden* is lacking something in terms of presentation and while this isn't the end of the world, it suggests a great many negative things about the amount of time that has been put into making *Madden* this year. There are no creation options open to you either and although this doesn't detract from the overall game, it's still a shame. Yet another game feature that for some reason next-gen consoles wont get to enjoy while everybody else will.

However, the different versions do seem to be converging in some other respects, in particular the control layout. Those of you used to playing *Madden* on the PS2 will have to reacquaint yourselves with a different use of the triggers and face buttons from what you are used to. Sprinting and ball protection have moved to the shoulder buttons to be replaced by juke and stiff-arm control on the cross and triangle face buttons respectively. This takes some time to get used to after being so used to a different set-up, but that's nothing compared to the complications arising from trying to use the new lead blocker controls. This new feature is frankly lost on anyone who doesn't have an inside-out knowledge of American Football. For those of you who haven't seen this new feature, the lead blocker control gives up your


Night Fever
In any offensive situation you're ultimately looking for a little space or mistake to take advantage of. Having found it all you have to do is throw a perfectly weighted pass to your receiver and run for the end zone. Get a solid lead and he'll dance.
It's Good!
The kicking meter has had a complete overhaul for this edition of *Madden* and that can only mean that Field goals are much harder than before. You must pull back and then push forward on the right stick to kick the ball. On higher difficulties, any error will cost you dearly.
Jump the snap on defence using tilt control for advantage
Play in one spot and the pitch will degrade into a mud bath
The button layout has changed somewhat from the PS2 versions of *Madden*, but choosing your pass is no less complex on some plays.

responsibility for the quarterback in favour of one of your offensive line so you can open up a hole in the defence.

Players out there who enjoy using the running game have often complained of the AI's inadequacy and inconsistency when it came to offensive scrimmage play. Taking responsibility for it yourself is helpful, but only if you have some understanding of the technique and purpose of such play. With some perseverance and application you will eventually get to grips with it. There are few things as satisfying than a well planned and executed running game. It's the equivalent of shooting a sniper rifle and then realising you've got a shotgun strapped to your back that you forgot about. There's some added punch to this feature thanks to the Sixaxis control that EA has tried to incorporate into proceedings. A quick flick forward or backward with the pad will perform a heavy impact or cut-block on the defender. Having said that, these controls are hardly essential, as very similar moves can be performed with the right analogue (or highlight stick as EA likes to call it) instead. Slightly more useful is the new ability to jump the snap while on defence to gain the advantage in tight situations. This was originally introduced into EA Sports' college football title, *NCAA Football 07* and although it also takes some time to perfect it can be very effective. Until then you will be giving away a lot of penalties to the opposition.

At least the Superstar mode is available in this edition. The option to play as a single player and guide them through a career with the eventual aim of making the Hall Of Fame is an interesting twist on the usual career mode. It's still not perfect as some positions are infuriating to play through, but the Quarterback and Receiver are relatively straightforward. The more traditional franchise mode is equally straight-laced, but a more negative sense as much of the fancy news updates and radio show inserts that added some colour to the mode on other systems are missing here. *Madden NHL 07* on the PS3 seems to suffer from a similar lack of flair and pizzazz when compared to its PS2 cousin. That doesn't make it a worse game and purely in terms of entertainment, playability and graphics *Madden NHL 07* is superb. You are still left feeling like this could have been so much more. So long as you haven't picked this title up on another format, it's still worth seeing it in glorious high definition on the PS3.

Jon Gordon

next3 verdict

OVERALL COMMENT

There are some features missing from this next-gen version of *Madden* and some of the new ideas don't work so well, but *Madden NFL 07* is still an accomplished sports sim.

07 OUT OF 10

Profile

THE MADDEN BOWL

Each Super Bowl weekend for the past 11 years has seen EA hold a *Madden NFL* tournament on the latest edition of the game. This year's winner was Tampa Bay tight end, Alex Smith.

Blu movies

YOUR NEXT GENERATION MOVIE GUIDE BIBLE

Rating guide

ESSENTIAL	★★★★★
ROCKING	★★★★
GOOD	★★★
BARGAIN BIN	★★
BIN FODDER	★

ABOUT//

After being tantalised almost to the point of annoyance with the first two *X-Men* films, the general consensus was that the third instalment had to deliver some kind of resolution, and preferably one that involved a hugely expensive set piece. However, after a much-publicised change at the helm, most fans of the series were just hoping for a coherent adventure that didn't bastardise the source material too much. As it turns out, nought out of two ain't bad.

As if to somehow make up for the lack of real events in the last two films, Ratner and co nearly suffocate the film in plot and incident. This makes it incredibly hard to care about any one thing that's occurring, your focus instead forced along to the next mutant-plagued earth-shattering event. The rushed proceedings also mean that the characters we'd got to know in Singer's movies now only speak in exposition, making for a film that's hard work on the ears as well as the patience. Perhaps such troubles could have been avoided if they'd done away with at least one of the over-compensatory twists and deaths that litter the film and had more confidence in the mutant-cure storyline, but alas we'll never know.

And yet, even with the fanboys offended and our heads needlessly aching, *X-Men: The Last Stand* still manages to entertain, if only on a very base level. Whereas Singer's set pieces exercised restraint, Ratner's exercise wreckless abandon and to pleasing end. Call us shallow but there's something deeply satisfying about groups of superpowered mutants being let loose with a $150 million special effects budget, and that's exactly what happens here. Indeed, the film's melees are so agreeable that it nearly – nearly – makes all the mess that went before them worthwhile. ★★

PICTURE QUALITY

Almost unsurprisingly, Fox's biggest Blu-ray release yet has dazzling picture quality. Helped a great deal by the unmistakably sleek look of the *X-Men* films, *The Last Stand* is easily one of the most impressive transfers we have seen. The tremendous detail and terrific colours make for an unsurpassed high-definition experience, while the exuberance of the special effects is just as striking as it was on the cinema screen, if not more so. We would be very hard-pressed to decide whether this or *Superman Returns* should take the honours for best-looking comic book movie, but hopefully our indecision speaks volumes. ★★★★★

BEST BD SCENE

Wolverine's face-off with Jean Grey. Stunning stuff.

Director//Paul Verhoeven
Cast//Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sharon Stone, Michael Ironside **Price**//$27.99

TOTAL RECALL

Verhoeven does Dick on Mars

ABOUT//

Considering the nature of Hollywood, it's surprising that *Total Recall* hasn't been mimicked more obviously. Perhaps it's because meshing Eighties action cinema with Phillip K Dick sci-fi is deemed too risky a remit by producers, the consequence of which is that Verhoeven's sharp, striking Schwarzenegger vehicle remains irrefutably unique.

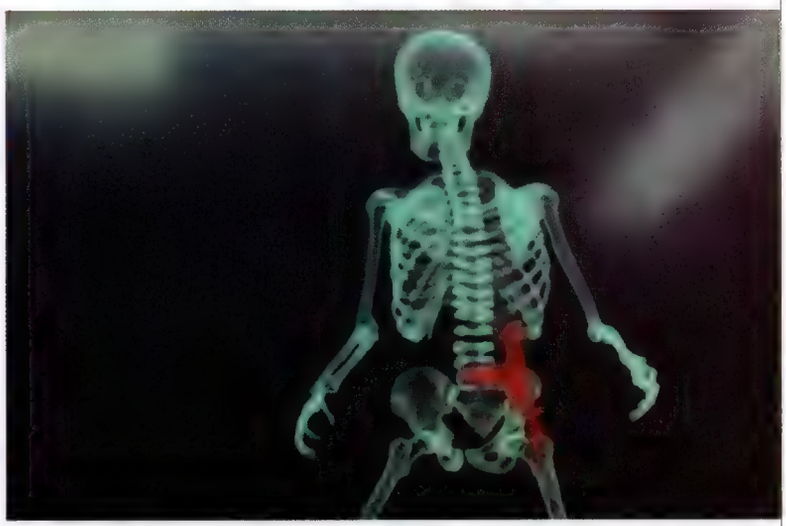
The identity crisis plot is interesting enough but when it's wrapped around the backdrop of the colonisation of Mars, it's as engaging a story as you're likely to find in a film so keen to crowd please it features characters with three boobs. Of course, this would all amount to nothing if the action itself wasn't top notch, which it is. No one goes over the top quite like Verhoeven, and here with Arnie in his prime, he excels even himself. The effects may have dated quickly and it may not seem quite as intelligent as it once did, but it sure is a heck of a lot of fun. Thoroughly recommended. ★★★★

PICTURE QUALITY

Though this is certainly one of the better high-definition updates of an older film that we have seen, it still lacks the sheer quality of something like *X-Men* or *Superman*. That said, the detail is, at times, remarkable and complement the non-CG effects well. Arnie seems to be a bit of a good luck charm for BDs.★★★★

BEST BD SCENE

The hard-to-breathe climax. Excellent detail.

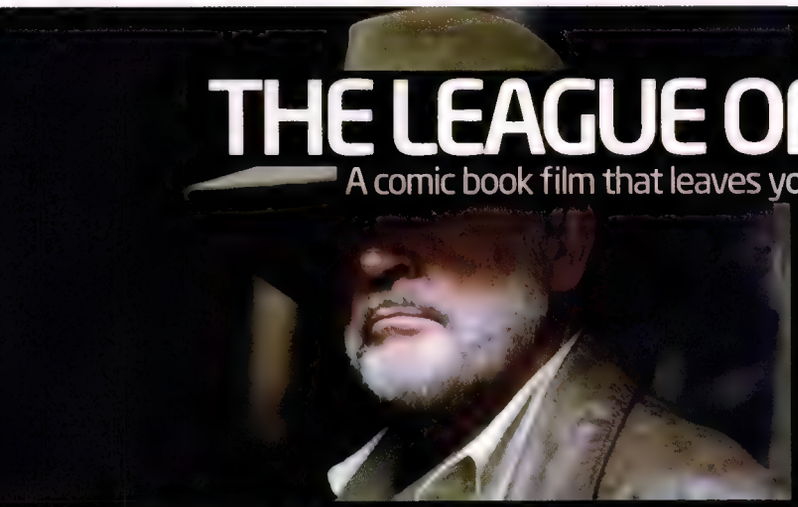


▽ MADDEN 2007 // BLU MOVIES // NEXT MONTH △

Director//Steven Norrington **Cast**//Sean Connery, Stuart Townsend, Max Ryan **Price**//$25.99

THE LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN

A comic book film that leaves you wanting Moore



ABOUT//

Though Alan Moore is prone to receiving more credit than he perhaps deserves, there's no denying that the Hollywood adaptation of his much-admired graphic novel offers inferior entertainment than its source does.

Set during the reign of Queen Victoria, *The League* chronicles the exploits of the era's more enigmatic fictional figures – such as Allan Quatermain and Mr Hyde – as they team up to take on the mysterious threat of the Fantom. It's all nonsense of course, but whereas the graphic novel injected the adventure with intelligence and dark humour, the film tries to play it po-faced. As a result it almost accidentally becomes one of the most absurd action films of recent years. It's not entirely without merit, with Norrington taking the chance to show that Blade's sound set pieces were no fluke, but it's far too clunky otherwise to warrant a purchase. ★★

PICTURE QUALITY

A thorough job has clearly been made on the transfer but unfortunately it just draws your attention to some of the lacklustre effects, most notably Mr Hyde. The rather dull colours don't help matters either. This is about as standard a Blu-ray as we've seen – not great, not bad, just in high-def. ★★★

BEST BD SCENE

Quatermain's introduction – at least it's not all brown.

ABOUT// Given his remarkable success with *Gladiator* it was perhaps inevitable that Ridley Scott would be lured back by the swords and sandals, but equally you'd be forgiven for thinking he might have given it a few more years before he did so, if only to avoid an unfavourable comparison.

Following the adventures of a widowed blacksmith in The Crusades, and more specifically the defence of the city of Jerusalem from the Arabs, *Kingdom Of Heaven* certainly deals with subject matter that is evocative enough to stand a chance against most of today's historical epics, but oddly it seems to lack an identity of its own. The battles rage fiercely and vividly, sure, but there have been so many similar ones this millennium that we've built up an immunity. The same goes for the rousing speeches and sub-standard romances.

That's not to say that it all isn't worked competently, as everyone from the director to the usually gormless Bloom should be commended for their efforts. The dearth of any real imagination, however, leaves the film feeling dreadfully stale, and consequently free from some much-needed emotional wallop. Staid when it should be stirring, familiar when it should be fresh, *Kingdom Of Heaven* fails to be anything but just another passable, good-looking epic. ★★★

Director// Ridley Scott **Cast**// Orlando Bloom, Liam Neeson, David Thewlis **Price**// $25.99

KINGDOM OF HEAVEN: THE DIRECTOR'S CUT

From the makers of Gladiator comes something a bit like Gladiator

PICTURE QUALITY

Absolutely stunning throughout. Every battle is marvellous to watch, setting a new standard for epics in high definition. The polished cinematography gets taken advantage of superbly as well, making for a truly brilliant example of what the high-definition format can do. If only the film was just that little bit better. ★★★★★

BEST BD SCENE

The siege of Jerusalem - the Holy War never looked so good.

Director// Domininc Sena **Cast**// Nicolas Cage, Angelina Jolie, Delroy Lindo **Price**// $29.99

GONE IN SIXTY SECONDS

Wow, cars, but in high definition

ABOUT// Few films capture all that is awful about Hollywood as perfectly as this one. Bloated by its own fat budget and full of sleepwalking paycheque performers, Gone In Sixty Seconds is as easy to hold in contempt as any film of the last decade.

Telling the tale of a group of bandits who have to steal a great load of shiny vehicles to save one of their own's life, the film feels more like a excuse to snow off its producer's automobile wish list than it does anything else.

Smothered in a sickening gloss that only a Bruckheimer cinematographer knows to employ and crumpled by pretty woeful dialogue, this really is utter garbage. ★

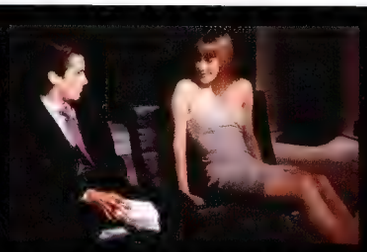
PICTURE QUALITY

It's all very shiny stuff, and the vehicles do look tasty in 1080p, but ultimately there's not enough here to really test the format. ★★★★

BEST BD SCENE

The ridiculous jump at the ridiculous end of this ridiculous film.

COMING SOON...



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1 The blackest of comedies in the highest definiton

FLYBOYS
2 A brand-spanking new war film about pilots, obviously.

FIRST BLOOD
3 Excellent post-Nam action flick. Go Sly!

BROKEN ARROW
4 Travolta and Slater Woo us with this nuke actioner.

TALLADEGA NIGHTS: THE BALLAD OF RICKY BOBBY
5 From the makers of Anchorman. Nuff said, surely.

ALIEN VS PREDATOR
6 Absolute crap in high-definition. Wow.

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7 One of the best war movies finds a new home on BD.

BATMAN BEGINS
8 Should be great on the next-gen disc.

THE MATRIX
9 The one we're all waiting for.

UNFORGIVEN
10 Another Clint western takes advantage of BD.

BECAUSE **WE CARE** ABOUT THE LITTLE FORMAT TOO

DVD round-up

Rating guide

ESSENTIAL	★★★★★
ROCKING	★★★★
GOOD	★★★
BARGAIN BIN	★★
BIN FODDER	★

Director//Christopher Smith **Cast**//Danny Dyer, Laura Harris, Tim McInnerny, Toby Stephens, Andy Nyman, Claudie Blakley **Price**//£17.99 **Out**//08 January 2007

SEVERANCE

Beware of the chop!

ABOUT//

Christopher Smith's follow-up to the woeful *Creep* is a more confident and assured work than his previous effort; so much so that we think it's one of the best British horror films in years. It's certainly up there with *Shaun Of The Dead* and *Dog Soldiers*, thanks to its brilliant blend of comedy, satire and – most important of all – horror.

Unlike *Creep*, Smith has filled *Severance* with genuinely likeable characters – headed by scene-stealing Danny Dyer and the stunning Laura Harris. Tim McInnerny shows up as the embarrassing boss of a special weapons corporation's sales division that has taken his gang to the Hungarian forest for team-building exercises. Finding the wrong cabin but holding up anyway, the team is soon subjected to a host of knife and gun-wielding psychos.

Severance is certainly contrived but Smith works wonders with the slasher film template. Some of the best bits are when he turns well-worn clichés on their head, including our heroes inadvertently boarding themselves in the cabin with a psycho, a three-way flashback of the history of the cabin and a brilliant sight gag involving a surface-to-air missile.

However, such moments are there to throw you off guard for what are mostly horrible and intense scenes of horror. But that's just a part of *Severance*'s brutal, twisted charm. ★★★★

EXTRAS

Audio commentary from members of the cast and crew, deleted scenes with optional commentary, four 'making-of' featurettes including the genesis of *Severance*, out-takes, alternative-ending storyboard sequence and Easter egg. ★★★★

Price//£19.99 **Out**//Now

CRANK

Action notched up to 11

ABOUT//

Crank is *Speed* with a guy instead of a bus and a film clearly made by videogame fans. The whole thing feels like an action movie in arcade game form.

It's so over the top and relentless, with some very inspired camera work, that by the end of the film (a brilliant final gag), you will definitely need a rest. Self-aware trashy fun that shouldn't be treated as anything but. ★★★

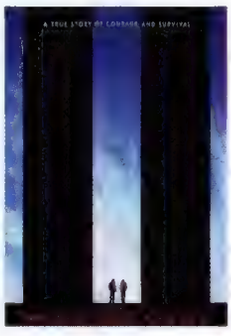
EXTRAS

★

Price//£19.99 **Out**//29 January 07

WORLD TRADE CENTRE

A film about some buildings



ABOUT//

Emotionally stunted and patriotically forced, Stone's *World Trade Centre* is nonetheless a welcome return to form after some of his recent endeavours. It's not his best, but it's hardly his worse either.

Instead it's restrained stuff with lashings of sugar coating and acceptable performances across the board – including Nicholas Cage, Maria Bello and Maggie Gyllenhaal. Amiable. ★★★

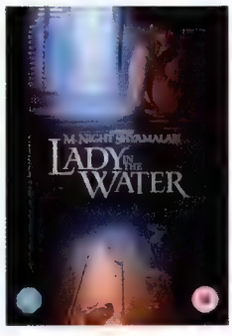
EXTRAS

★★★★

Price//£17.99 **Out**//15 January 07

LADY IN THE WATER

Stuck in the drain pipe



ABOUT//

What's happened to wunderkind film director M. Night Shyamalan? The once-golden child of film arguably peaked with *Unbreakable* and since then has churned out increasingly worse films. *Lady In The Water* is a modern-day fairytale for adults with some cute ideas and generally good performances. It's enjoyable – but it's nothing of the filmmaker *Unbreakable* hinted it, which is a shame. ★★★

EXTRAS

★★★

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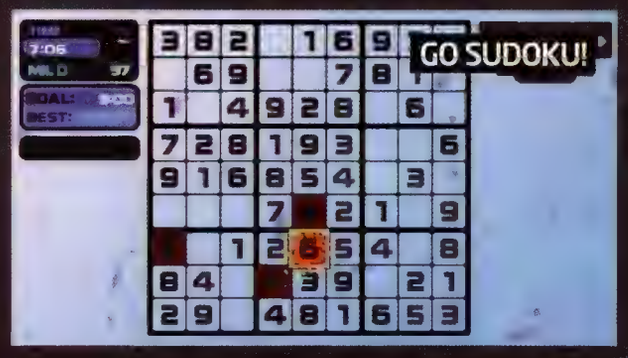

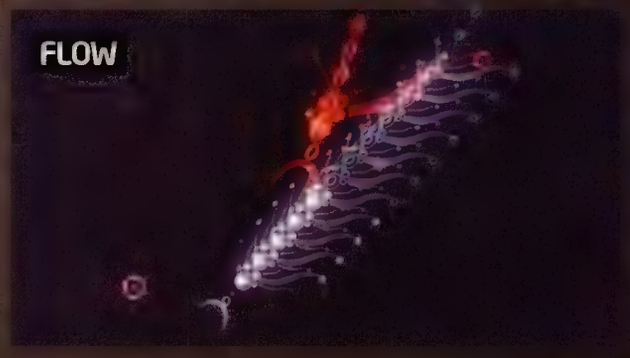

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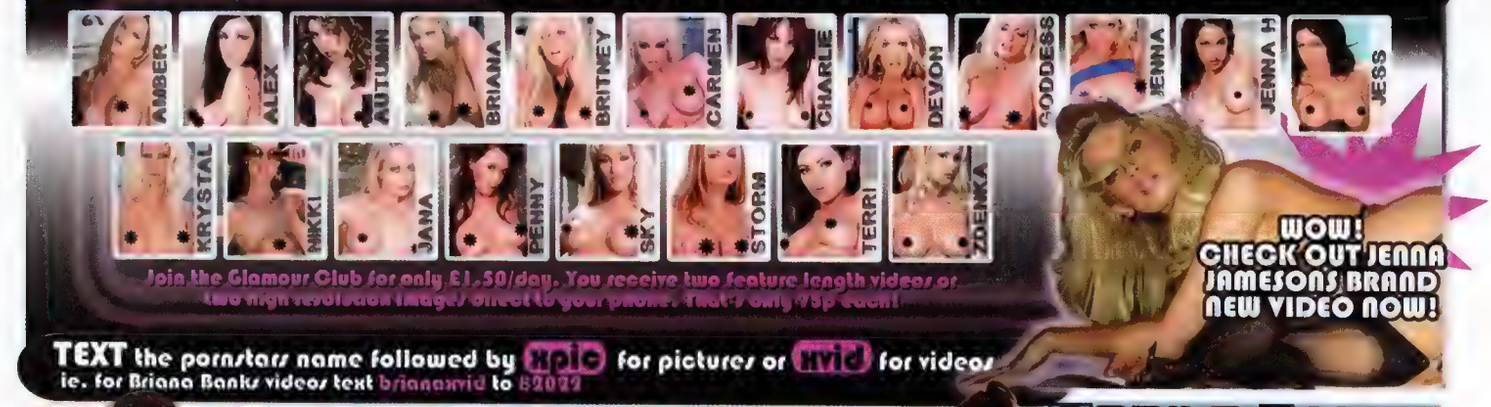

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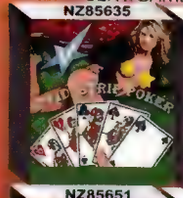

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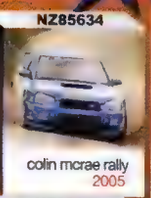

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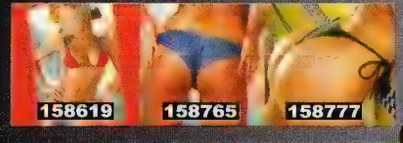

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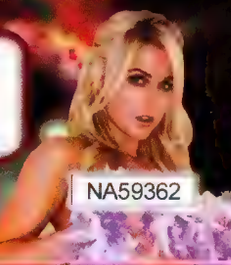

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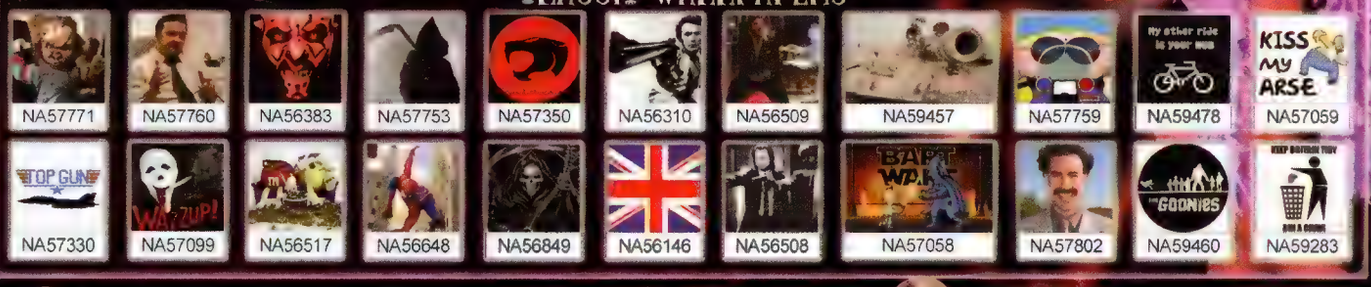

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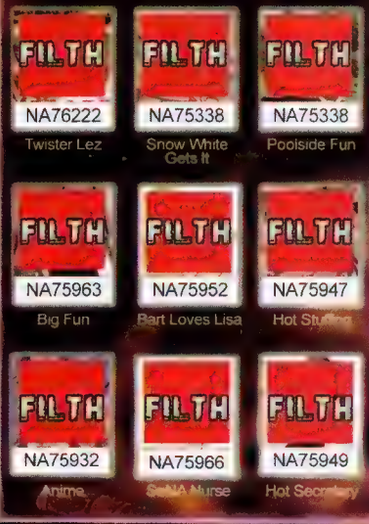

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Magic Moments
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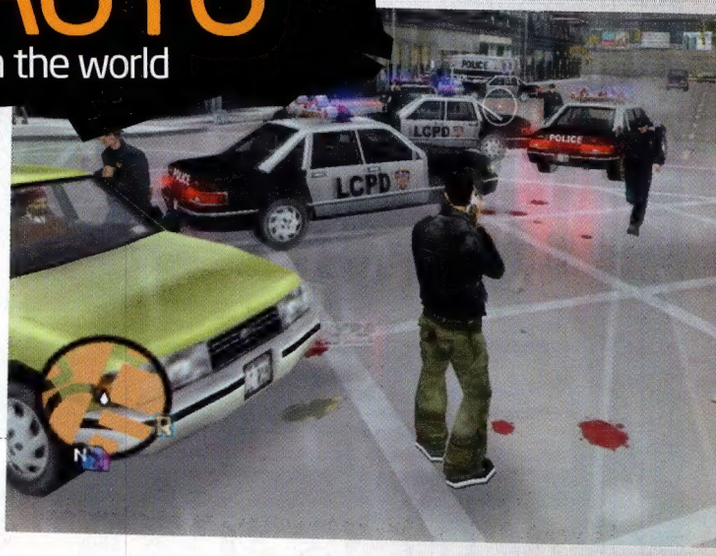
Remembering why PlayStation gaming is the best in the world



1 //Fully 3D (GTA III) The leap from top-down graphics to a full 3D world was obviously one of the biggest innovations in the franchise. The opportunity to play through a living, breathing city environment was a huge selling point – as was the violence, humour and sandbox design.

2 //Skydiving (San Andreas) There was nothing more elegant than hijacking a plane or helicopter, rising as close to the stratosphere as possible, and then leaping out, plummeting for what felt like minutes.

3 //Phil Collins (Vice City Stories) We've mentioned him already in this issue and that's because we love him truly. Dearly. Madly. Manly. Putting him in a game as a character you have to protect during a concert is just inspired.

4 //Donuts (GTA) Sure, you can do this in any of the games – but you always remember the first time, and for us it was in the original game. Hitting a crowd of people and performing a 360° turn usually resulted in a blood-red donut left on the pavement. It's the smaller things that count.

5 //Gouranga (GTA) These guys have shown up in several *GTA*s and they're asking for a fate worse than death each time. Sorry, but we hate hippies.

6 //Rooftop jumping (Vice City) Some of the side missions make for the more memorable moments in *GTA* games. The rooftop-jumping exercise in *Vice City* via motorbike and huge ramps is classic stuff.

7 //The controversy (Every GTA Game) Not only do we welcome each new *GTA* with open arms, we also love the various stories, attempted banning and *Daily Mail* reports that show up too. At the end of the day, it only serves to help Rockstar. Something the people rallying against it don't realise.

8 //Hookers are suckers (GTA III) Pick up a hooker, cruise to a desolate location, and let her do her thing... then beat the crap out of her and get your money back.

9 //BMX (San Andreas) At a time when everyone else was boasting about having motorbikes in their city-based games, Rockstar introduced push bikes into the series. Genius. Here's a company that really understands its audience.

10 //Jetpack (GTA San Andreas) What's the one thing that can make any awful videogame worth playing? A jetpack. So the moment it appears in one of the best games of all time, makes it even better.

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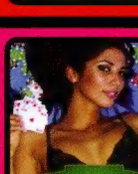

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